

# THE VENETO

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For centuries the proud flag of the lion of St Mark fluttered over the cities and towns of most of northeast Italy. At its core is the region today known as the Veneto – a land of plains country in the south, and mountains (great walking territory) on its northern boundary.

Water, as always in the story of Venice, also plays its part. The western extremity of the region is shut off by one of Italy's great northern lakes, Lago di Garda, while to the north and south of La Serenissima stretch the beaches of the Adriatic. The region's southern boundary is marked by the country's mightiest river, the Po, which empties into the Adriatic here.

Long before Venice swallowed up the territory in the early 15th century, it was divided into a series of competing city-states, the most important of which were Padua (Padova), Vicenza and Verona. The mark of the lion is unmistakable in all, but each has retained its own distinct character.

An abundance of other towns, rarely more than a couple of hours away from Venice, will also draw the curious traveller, from the riverside medieval core of Treviso to the heart of grappa country, Bassano, and the hilltop eyrie of Asolo.

In between the towns rise the proud mansions and villas of Venice's once-wealthy noble families, particularly along the River Brenta and around Vicenza.

## THE BIG CITIES

The most striking attractions beyond Venice lie conveniently strung out along the main east-west railway line. First stop is **Padua** (p222), a busy university town 37km away and still partly protected by its old city walls. Known to some as the city of St Anthony and to others as a fine-arts shrine because of Giotto's remarkable frescoes, it is a dynamic place with a surprisingly extensive medieval core.

Next up is **Vicenza** (p228), a quiet town 32km northwest of Padua. Its compact old centre is a palette of Palladian wonders.

Another 51km brings you to **Verona** (p216), the prettiest of the trio. The star attraction is the grand **Roman Arena** (p216), but romantics also come on a Shakespearean quest to seek out reminders of his heart-breaking heroes, Romeo and Juliet. Beautifully sited on the River Adige, the city has much to offer.

## PALLADIO & THE VENETIAN VILLAS

As wealthy Venetian families turned their sights away from the sea and towards the land, so by the age of Palladio they had come to invest in fine country residences. These Venetian villas, in particular those clustered along the River Brenta and around Vicenza, provide a remarkable insight into the lives of the lagoon city's aristocrats in a bygone era. Keep an eye out for Palladio's **Villa Foscari** (p233) and the sprawling gardens of the magnificent **Villa Pisani** (p234).

Part two of the Venetian Villa escapade takes you to **Vicenza** (p228). The city itself boasts several mansions by Palladio and others, but those with a passion for villas and a set of wheels can tour the surrounding countryside in search of still more.

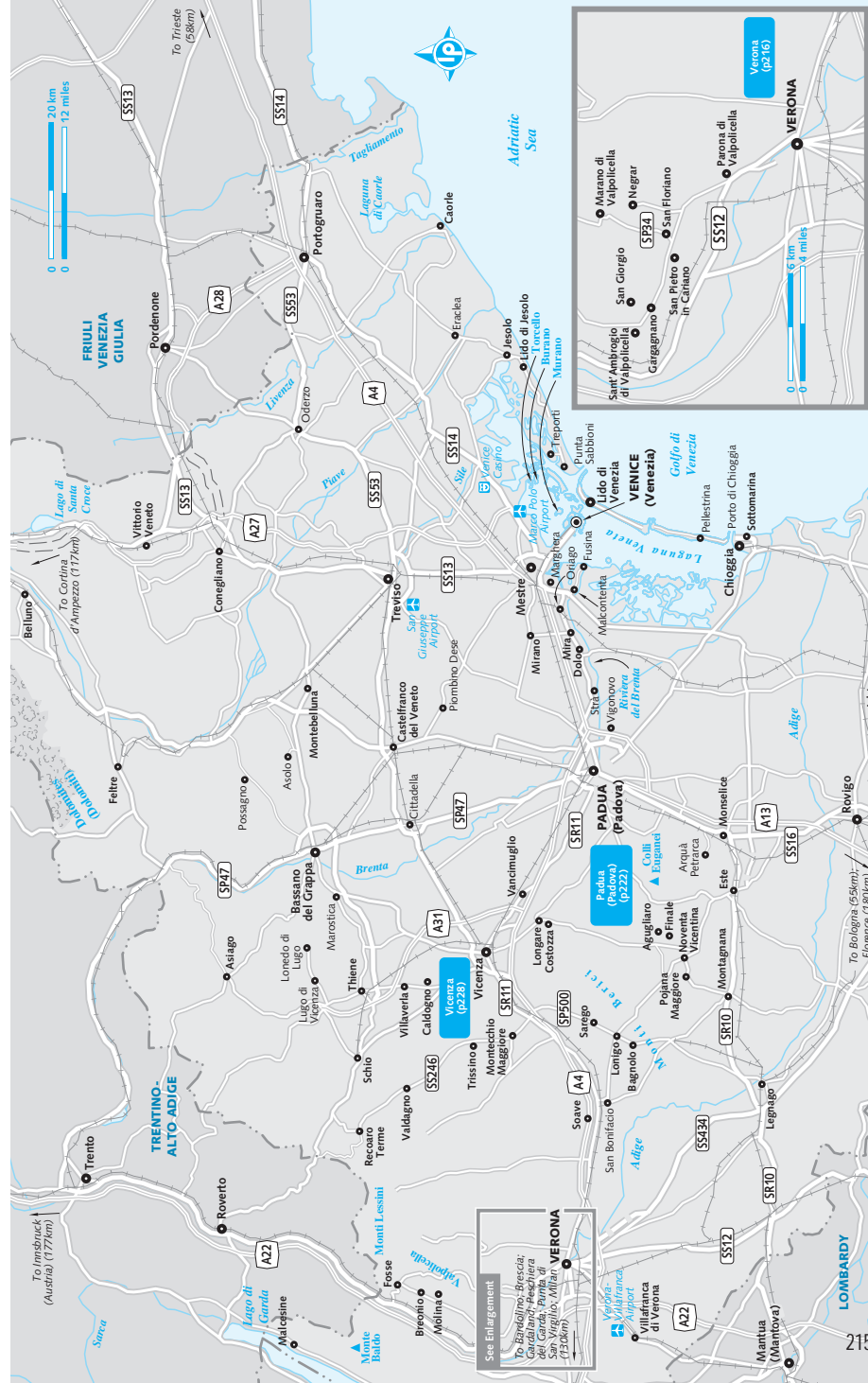
## FORTIFIED TOWNS &... WINE

In between the grand medieval cities are scattered all sorts of minor gems that are perfect for a day or two of exploration. Several possible circuits suggest themselves, and you can reach many of these places without your own transport.

Just 30km northwest of Venice is a city often overlooked even by those whose Ryanair flights take them to within a whisker of the place – **Treviso** (p234). The 'City of Water' is a surprisingly charming stop whose old centre nestles in between the River Sile and Canal Cagnan, featuring old water mills and leafy corners. To the north and northeast of Treviso is a trio of delightful little towns: **Oderzo** (p236), a miniature version of Treviso; **Conegliano** (p236), a *prosecco* (sparkling white wine) centre; and **Vittorio Veneto** (p237).

West of Treviso, a railway line proceeds to the curious walled town of **Castelfranco del Veneto** (p240) and on to its more impressive neighbour, **Cittadella** (p240), before heading to pretty **Bassano del Grappa** (p237). Every attempt should be made to reach the nearby hill town of **Asolo** (p239).

South of Padua is another string of engaging fortified towns: **Monselice** (p228), **Este** (p228) and the most striking of all, **Montagnana** (p228).



Near Verona, excursions suggest themselves to a castle-topped wine town ([Soave](#), [p222](#)); the [Valpolicella wine valleys](#) ([p221](#)); or the beautiful [Lago di Garda](#) ([p221](#)), where Bardolino reds are made.

## BEACHES

Although the Adriatic is not the most splendid of Mediterranean coastlines, it does provide a viable summertime escape from the humidity of the Venetian lagoon. To the northeast of Venice lie the beaches of [Lido di Jesolo](#) ([p241](#)). You can reach their southern strips by taking the ferry to Punta Sabbioni, or drive around to Lido di Jesolo itself. This is the most popular of the Veneto's sunshine spots, with sandy beaches, reasonably clear water and a fairly busy summer clubbing scene. Further to the northeast, [Caorle](#) ([p241](#)) is a pleasant seaside fishing town with a good deal more history than its brasher neighbour.

## VERONA & AROUND

Stroll arm in arm with your loved one along the quiet streets of Verona (population 259,070) on a winter's night and you could be forgiven for believing the tragic love story of Romeo and Juliet to be true. Well it ain't, but not to worry – Verona is one of Italy's most beautiful cities (the whole place is a Unesco World Heritage site) and hardly in need of Shakespearean hyperbole.

### TRANSPORT: VERONA & AROUND

**Distance from Venice** Verona 120km; Villafranca di Verona 132km; Peschiera del Garda 143km; Bardolino 157km; Malcesine 189km; San Pietro in Cariano 137km; Fosse 152km; Molina 161km; Soave 98km

**Direction** West

**Air** The airport [Verona-Villafranca](#) (% 045 809 56 66; [www.aeroporoverona.it](#)) is 12km outside town and accessible by **APT** bus (% 045 805 79 11) from the train station (€4.50, 15 minutes, departures every 20 minutes from 6am to 11pm). Flights arrive here from all over Italy and some European cities, including Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, Brussels, London and Paris. Ryanair flies in from several cities to Brescia, to the west. **Airport buses** ([www.cgabrescia.it](#)) connect the train station with Brescia airport (one way/return €11/16, 45 minutes).

**Bus** The main intercity bus station is in front of the train station. Buses are useful only for provincial localities not served by train. The **AMT** ([www.amt.it](#)) city transport company's buses 11, 12, 13 and 14 (bus 91 or 92 on Sunday and holidays) connect the train station with Piazza Brà. Tickets (on sale at tobacco stores and newsstands) cost €1. **APT** ([www.apv.it](#)) runs buses around Verona province, including a bus to Soave (see [p222](#)).

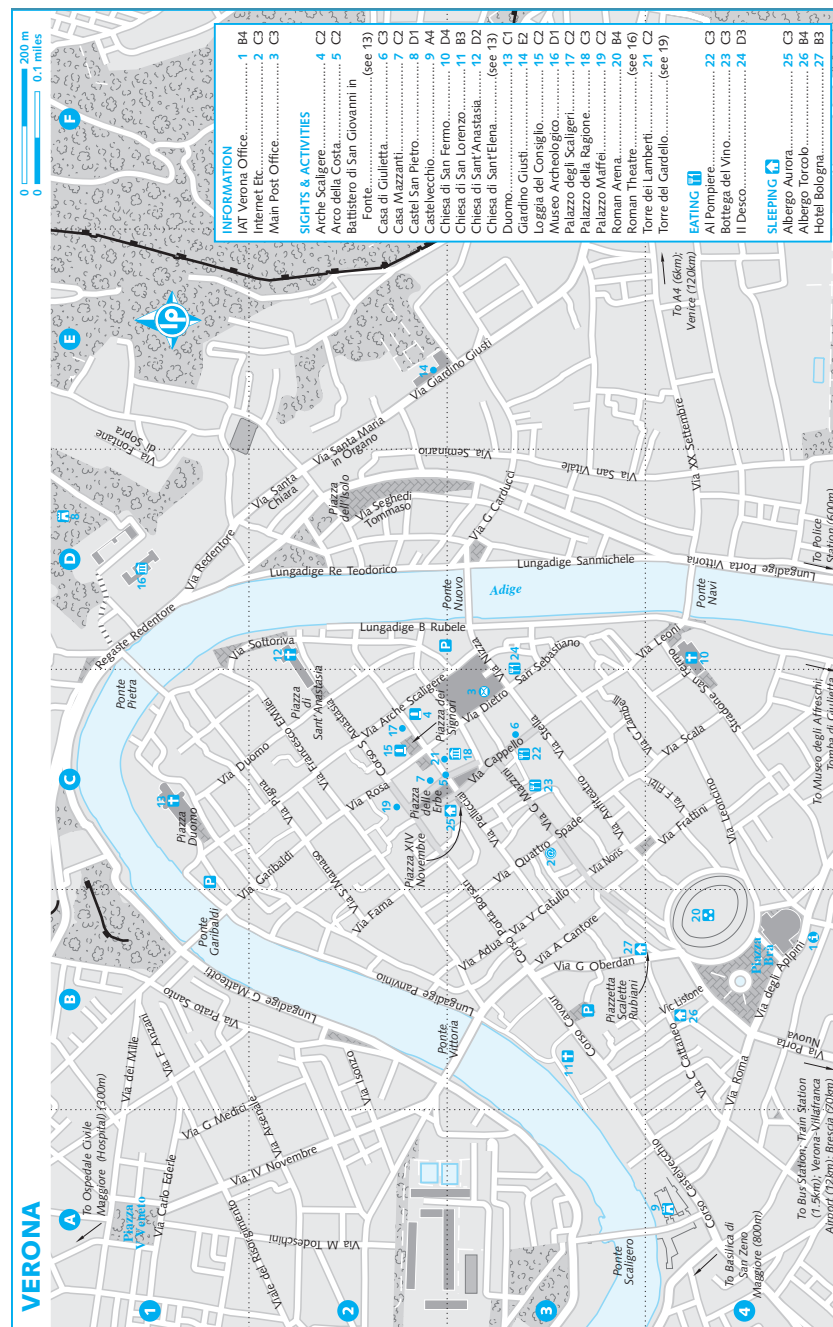
**Car** Verona is at the intersection of the Serenissima A4 (Milan–Venice) and Brennero A22 autostrade. From Venice you can be there in not much more than an hour.

**Train** The trip from Venice is easiest by train (€6.10 to €14; 1¼ to 2¼ hours).

Known as Piccola Roma (Little Rome) for its importance in the days of the Roman Empire, its golden era came during the 13th and 14th centuries under the colourful, roller-coaster reign of the Della Scala family (aka the Scaligeri). The period was indeed noted for the savage family feuding to which Will alluded in his play. Peace and quiet came with the absorption of the city and its surrounding territory by Venice in 1405. With a handful of exceptions, the city lived in peace for the next four centuries. Napoleon put an end to that in 1797. The city briefly revolted against his control that same year, and from then on the city largely shared the fate of Venice. WWII left much of the city damaged and the 1950s were spent rebuilding and restoring.

The **Verona Card** ([www.veronacard.it](#); adult for 1/3 days €8/12), available from the sights, tobacco outlets, the train-station tourist office and the Western Union office at the airport, gains you admission to all the main monuments and churches, and reduced admission to a few places of lesser importance. The card also gives unlimited use of the town's local buses. On Monday a lot of sights are open in the afternoon only, or closed.

For many, the heart of Verona is its pink-marble 1st-century **Roman Arena** (% 045 800 32 04, opera bookings 045 800 51 11; [www.arena.it](#); Piazza Brà; adult/student/child €4/3/1; 11–8.30am–7.30pm Tue–Sun, 1.45–7.30pm Mon Oct–Jun, 8am–3.30pm Jul–Sep). Once the scene of gladiatorial spectacles, it now



stages a rather less bloodcurdling annual open-air opera season (July to September). The third-largest Roman amphitheatre in existence, it could seat around 30,000 people. It is remarkably well preserved, despite a 12th-century earthquake that destroyed most of its outer wall. The arena, similar to others built in Aosta, Arles and Nîmes, has had a mixed career. From the shows and games of the Roman Empire to the opera of today, it was a long way. In medieval times the matinee showing tended to be jousts or autos-da-fé. In the meantime, the generous arcades were too good to simply admire, and ended up being used to install shops, depots and even private rooms. By the 16th century, the arcades were the designated location for the city's prostitutes. From the 18th century, a popular show was the *caccia al toro*, in which bulls were pitted against specially trained dogs. The arena's gentler operatic career began with a performance of *Aida* in 1913.

Just off Via Giuseppe Mazzini, central Verona's main shopping street, is the **Casa di Giulietta** (Juliet's House; ☎ 045 803 43 03; Via Cappello 23; adult/student/child €4/3/1; ʘ 8.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sun, 1.45-7.30pm Mon). Romeo and Juliet may have been fictional, but here you can swoon beneath what popular myth says was her balcony or, if in need of a new lover, approach a bronze statue of Juliet and rub her right breast for good luck. Others have made their eternal mark by adding to the slew of scribbled love graffiti on the walls leading into the courtyard (see the boxed text, *opposite*). It is, by the way, doubtful there ever was a feud between the Cappello and Montecchi families (the former may well have lived in this building), on whom Shakespeare based the play.

If the theme excites you, search out the **Tomba di Giulietta** (Juliet's Tomb; ☎ 045 800 03 61; Via del Pontiere 35; adult/student/child €3/2/1; ʘ 8.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sun, 1.45-7.30pm Mon), whose museum contains frescoes transferred from sites across Verona and a collection of 1st-century Roman amphorae. The red marble coffin itself was long used as a drinking trough and only set up in its present 'Gothic' in the 20th century as tourists began to flock to see it! The buildings here belonged to a medieval Franciscan monastery and upstairs is located the **Museo degli Affreschi**, which holds frescoes and fragments of frescoes brought here from various locations around the city. Some of them date as far back as the 12th century, although most are religious scenes done in the 16th century.

On the site of the Roman forum, **Piazza delle Erbe** remains the lively heart of the city. The permanent market stalls in its centre lend the square an agreeable bustling air, although they detract a little from its beauty – it's lined with some of Verona's most sumptuous buildings, including the baroque **Palazzo Maffei**, at the northern end, with the adjoining 14th-century **Torre del Gardello**. On the eastern side the fresco-adorned façade of **Casa Mazzanti**, a former Della Scala family residence, stands out.

Separating Piazza delle Erbe from Piazza dei Signori is the **Arco della Costa**, beneath which is suspended what is said to be a whale's rib. One legend (there are several) says it will fall on the first 'just' person to walk beneath it. In several centuries it has never fallen, not even on the various popes who have paraded beneath it. Ascend the nearby 12th-century **Torre dei Lamberti** (☎ 045 803 27 26; Piazza dei Signori; admission by lift/on foot €3/2; ʘ 9.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sun, 1.30-7.30pm Mon), which was in fact only completed in 1463, for a great view of the city. The building of which the tower is a part, **Palazzo della Ragione** (Palazzo Forti; ☎ 199 199111; www.palazzoforti.it; Piazza dei Signori; admission around €10, depending on exhibition; ʘ 9.30am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-9.30pm Sat-Sun), has since early 2007 been a central exhibition space for the city, putting on major art exhibits.

Occupying the north side of Piazza dei Signori is the 15th-century **Loggia del Consiglio**, the former city council building and Verona's finest Renaissance structure. It is attached to the **Palazzo degli Scaligeri**, once the main residence of the Della Scala clan. Through the archway at the far end of the piazza are the **Arche Scaligere**, the elaborate family tombs of what was Verona's most illustrious, although often bloodthirsty, ruling family, prior to Verona's submission to Venice's less flamboyant (and more peaceful) rule. You can see the tombs quite well from the outside, which is a good thing because you are not allowed in any more. The equestrian statues that top two of the main funerary monuments are copies of the medieval originals (which can be seen in the Castelvecchio museum).

North from the Arche Scaligere stands the **Chiesa di Sant'Anastasia** (Piazza di Sant'Anastasia; ʘ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 1-6pm Sun Mar-Oct, 10am-1pm & 1.30-4pm Tue-Sat, 1-5pm Sun Nov-Feb), started in 1290 but not completed until the late 15th century. It is the most imposing example of Gothic church-building in the city. Raised by the Dominican order and officially named San Pietro Martire

(St Peter the Martyr), the citizens continued to call it by the name of the humbler church that had stood here before. A long parade of fine canvases is capped by a Pisanello fresco, in the sacristy towards the right at the rear end of the church, of *San giorgio che parte per liberare la donzella dal drago* (St George Setting out to Free the Princess from the Dragon).

A combined entrance ticket to all the main churches costs €5. Otherwise, admission to each costs €2.50. For more information, check out [www.chiese.verona.it](http://www.chiese.verona.it).

The 12th-century **Duomo** (Cathedral; Piazza Duomo; ʘ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 1.30-5.30pm Sun Mar-Oct, 10am-1pm & 1.30-4pm Tue-Sat, 1-5pm Sun Nov-Feb) combines Romanesque (lower half) and Gothic (upper half) styles and has some intriguing features. Look for the sculpture of Jonah and the whale on the south porch and the statues of two of Charlemagne's paladins, Roland and Oliver, on the west porch. In the first chapel of the left aisle is an *Assunta* (Assumption) by Titian. The cathedral was built on the site of earlier churches, built as long ago as the 5th century. As you penetrate the church this becomes evident. Firstly though, your gaze will be drawn to the oval structure at the rear of the church that surround the choir stalls. It is a fresco-adorned marble structure done by Michele Sanmichele in the 16th century. The door below the 17th century organ leads to two adjoining buildings that were once separate churches. Straight ahead is the **Chiesa di Sant'Elena**, which contains some elements of an original 5th century basilica. The **Battistero di San Giovanni in Fonte**, out the back, features a beautifully sculpted, octagonal baptismal font that dates at least to the 12th century.

At the river end of Via Leoni, **Chiesa di San Fermo** (Stradone San Fermo; ʘ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 1-6pm Sun Mar-Oct, 10am-1pm & 1.30-4pm Tue-Sat, 1-5pm Sun Nov-Feb) is actually two churches in one. Franciscan monks raised the Gothic church in the 13th century over the original 11th-century Romanesque structure. Inside the main (Gothic church) your attention is first drawn to the magnificent timber *a carena di nave*, a ceiling suggesting an upturned boat's hull. In the right transept are preserved some 14th-century frescoes, including some fragments depicting episodes in the life of St Francis. Stairs from the cloister lead underground to the spare but engaging Romanesque church below.

Southwest from Piazza delle Erbe towards the Ponte Scaligero is the **Chiesa di San Lorenzo** (Corso Cavour; ʘ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 1-6pm Sun Mar-Oct, 10am-1pm & 1.30-4pm Tue-Sat, 1-5pm Sun Nov-Feb), a Romanesque church raised in the early 12th century but much altered with Gothic and Renaissance additions. The most unusual element and virtually unique in Italy are the two cylindrical towers that flank the entrance.

The 14th-century fortress, **Castelvecchio** (☎ 045 806 26 11; Corso Castelvecchio 2; adult/student/child €4/2/1; ʘ 8.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sun, 1.30-7.30pm Mon) was raised by Cangrande II (of the Scaligeri family), little loved by the townspeople and anxious to protect himself against threats from home and abroad. Having gone to all that trouble, he was stabbed to death by his charming brother Canfrancesco inside the fortress walls. The restored fortress houses a museum with a diverse collection of paintings, frescoes, jewellery and medieval artefacts. Among the paintings are works by

## MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING...

Over the decades lovers, star-crossed and otherwise, have indulged in the custom of scribbling their amorous declarations on to the walls of Juliet's supposed medieval residence and, since 2003, using chewing gum to post messages on paper (the result is nauseating). Sick of the mess, Verona's town council declared an end to these mucky customs in late 2004. Seeing that post boxes for love notes and guest books for love messages were a flop, the council set aside space in the short tunnel giving access to the courtyard for the scribblers and chewing gum folks (what is their problem?). The threat of a €1039 fine for dirtying the courtyard walls seems to have worked, though. Since they were cleaned up, not a pen mark or scrap of chewy has been seen.

From the early 19th century, curious travellers were turning up in Verona to see the house of a person who had never existed. Charles Dickens was one of a line-up of European writers to set eyes on what was long a run-down inn and, later, stables. In 1905 it was put up for sale and, under a wave of media pressure, the Verona town council bought it. Thirty years later the council did the house up, giving an essentially 17th-century structure its rather forced Gothic flavour. It is thought the famous balcony was assembled, of all things, of the sides of a medieval sarcophagus. So much for the romanticism!

Pisanello, Giovanni Bellini, Tiepolo, Carpaccio and Veronese. Also of note is a 14th-century equestrian statue of Cangrande I, the fortress-builder's ancestor and most illustrious of the Della Scala clan. The **Ponte Scaligero** spanning the River Adige was rebuilt after being destroyed by WWII bombing.

A masterpiece of Romanesque architecture, the **Basilica di San Zeno Maggiore** (Piazza San Zeno; h 8.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 1-6pm Sun Mar-Oct, 10am-1pm & 1.30-4pm Tue-Sat, 1-5pm Sun Nov-Feb), named in honour of the city's patron saint, was built mainly in the 12th century, although its apse was rebuilt in the 14th century and its bell tower, a relic of an earlier structure on the site, was started in 1045. The basilica's magnificent rose window depicts the wheel of fortune, which had a habit of turning good and bad for Verona's rulers with dizzying rapidity. On either side of the main doors are sculpted scenes from the two Testaments.

Inside you pass by the graceful cloister into the church proper. It is a feast for the eyes, with an array of striking frescoes still in place – they range from the 12th to the 15th century. Approach those on the right after the steps that lead past the crypt and have a close look. They are festooned with graffiti, some dating as far back as 1390 and one to...1998! Down in the crypt the robed remains of St Zeno are eerily lit up in his transparent sarcophagus. Artistically, the highlight is Mantegna's *Maestà della vergine* (The Majesty of the Virgin Mary), above the high altar.

Across **Ponte Pietra**, north of the city centre, is a **Roman theatre**, built in the 1st century. The bridge is a quiet but remarkable testament to the Italians' love of their artistic heritage. The two arches on the left date from the Roman Republican era (1st century BC), while the other three were replaced in the 13th century. Then in 1945, retreating German troops blew-up the bridge. The Veronese fished the stonework out of the river and painstakingly rebuilt the bridge in the 1950s. The theatre itself, cunningly carved into the hillside at a strategic spot overlooking a bend in the river in the 1st century BC, was once three times as high as what remains today.

Take the lift at the back of the theatre to the former convent above, which houses an interesting collection of Greek and Roman pieces in the **Museo Archeologico** (% 045 800 03 60; Regaste Redentore 2; adult/student/child €3/2/1; h 8.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sun, 1.45-7.30pm Mon). On a hill high behind the theatre and museum is the **Castel San**

**Pietro**, built by the Austrians on the site of an earlier castle.

Back down at the **Ponte Pietra**, head about 200m south along the river and then along **Via Redentore** and its continuation (it changes name several times) about 600m to reach lush sculpted gardens known as **Giardino Giusti** (% 045 803 40 29; Via Giardino Giusti 2; admission €5; h 9am-8pm Apr-Sep, 9am-sunset Oct-Mar), named after the noble family that has looked after it and the mansion since opening the garden to visitors in 1591. It is the only such private residence left in Verona. The garden is an Italianate mix of the sculpted and natural, graced by soaring cypresses (one of which the German poet Goethe immortalised in his travel writings). You can get lost in the little labyrinth at the right of the garden, and climb the far end of it for sweeping views over the city. It is a verdant and peaceful oasis.

## INFORMATION

**Guardia Medica** (% 045 807 56 27; h 8pm-8am) A locum doctor service – doctors usually come to you.

**Hotel Reservations** (www.veronaitaly.it, www.veronapass.com)

**IAT tourist office** Train Station (% 045 800 08 61; h 8am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun); Verona-Villafranca airport (% 045 861 91 63; h 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-3pm Sun Apr-Nov, 9am-4pm Mon-Sat, 9am-3pm Sun Dec-Mar); Via degli Alpini 9 (% 045 806 86 80; www.tourism.verona.it; h 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun)

**Internet Etc** (% 045 800 02 22; Via Quattro Spade 3b; per hr €5.50; h 2.30-8pm Mon, 10.30am-8pm Tue-Sat, 3.30-8pm Sun)

**Juliet & Co Guided Tours** (% 045 810 31 73; www.julietandco.com; adult/child €10/free; h 5.30pm daily Apr-Oct) The tours of the centre of town last about 1½ hours and start at the tourist office at Via degli Alpini off Piazza Brà.

**Main post office** (Piazza Viviani 7; h 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat)

**Ospedale Civile Maggiore** (hospital; % 045 807 11 11; Piazzale Stefani 1)

**Police station** (% 045 809 04 11; Lungadige Galtarossa 11)

## EATING

**Il Desco** (% 045 801 00 15; Via Dietro San Sebastiano 7; meals €120-150; h lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) **Rated one** of the best restaurants in Italy and a Michelin-star winner, this is a quietly elegant stop for high-class local cuisine.

**Bottega del Vino** (% 045 800 45 35; www.bottegevini.it; Vicolo Scudo di Francia 3a; meals €60-70; h lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) At least wander into this age-old wine cellar for the frescoes and atmosphere. Better still, sit down to fine local food, an endless wine list and exquisite service.

**Al Pempiere** (% 045 803 05 37; Vicolo Regina d'Ungheria 5; meals €35-40; h lunch Tue-Sat, dinner Mon-Sat) The fireman's (*pompieri's*) hat is still on the wall, along with a host of B&W photos from down the years. Tuck into a plate of *bigoli con le sarde* (chunky spaghetti with sardines) followed by some hearty *pastissada de caval*, a horsemeat dish.

## SLEEPING

**Hotel Bologna** (% 045 800 68 30; www.hotelbologna.vr.it; Piazzetta Scalette Rubiani 3; s/d €125/200; a i p ) A good three-star very close to Piazza Brà, this place has comfortable if slightly anodyne rooms. The huge restaurant offers a generous buffet breakfast.

**Albergo Aurora** (% 045 59 47 17; www.hotelaurora.biz; Piazza XIV Novembre 2; s €90-120, d €98-140) The better rooms in this sprawling, central hotel are spacious and comfortable. The terrace is a pleasant spot for a drink and a little sun.

**Albergo Torcolo** (% 045 800 75 12; www.hoteltorcolo.it; Vicolo Listone 3; s €50-82, d €85-114) A quiet little building barely 50m off Piazza Brà, this spot has a variety of rooms. Some of the most attractive feature wrought-iron bed heads and timber ceiling beams.

## AROUND VERONA

About 12km southwest of Verona, **Villafranca di Verona** has a largely 19th-century look but is dominated by its vast if partly dilapidated **Castello** (% 045 790 29 01; Piazza Castello; h 3-6pm Sat, 3.30-6.30pm Sun), raised in the 13th century and expanded by the Scaligeri clan. The brick walls enclose a vast, grassy courtyard, while its remaining central buildings are home to a museum dedicated to the story of Italian unification. Regular trains do the 15-minute run to Villafranca di Verona.

Barely 20km west of Verona stretches the marvellous **Lago di Garda**, which also marks the frontier between the Veneto and Lombardy. Frequent trains heading for Milan call in at **Peschiera del Garda**, on the south end of the lake. Virtually next door (2km away), in Castelnuovo del Garda, is Italy's favourite theme park, **Gardaland** (% 045 644 97 77; www.gardaland.it;

adult/child under 10yr €27/23; h 9.30am-6.30pm daily Apr-mid-Jun & late Sep, 9.30am-midnight daily mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 9.30am-6.30pm Sat & Sun Oct, 10am-6.30pm Sat, Sun & holidays Dec & Jan). This place has all the usual suspects, from wild rides to Wild West scenes. A free shuttle bus connects the train station with the park. A couple of other theme parks operate in the same area.

The easiest way to tour around the lake, or just up the eastern (Veneto) bank between Peschiera and Riva del Garda (in Trento province), is with your own set of wheels. Your first stop might be **Bardolino** (15km), if only in the name of its fine red wine. The pleasant old village is lined with shops and restaurants, its pedestrian streets meandering down to the lakeside. The **Chiesa di San Zeno** dates to the 9th century, while **Chiesa di San Severo's** present incarnation, with its tall bell tower by the main road, has elements from the 10th to the 12th centuries. Highlights along the following 40km, before you leave the Veneto, include **Punta di San Virgilio** (8km from Bardolino), with its cute port reached along a way lined with cypresses and citrus orchards. From the port itself you have some lovely lake views. Approximately 26km north huddles **Malcesine**, which is dominated by its medieval defensive castle, raised by Verona's Scaligeri rulers on the foundations of a Lombard fort. Behind Malcesine, an escarpment rises quickly to the peaks of **Monte Baldo**. Take a **cable car** (% 045 740 02 06; www.funiviedelbaldo.it; 1 way/return €10.50/16; h 8am-4pm) up into this high country, where you will find hiking trails, refuges and, in winter, even a little skiing.

Verona's hinterland is like a wine dictionary. To the west, as mentioned previously, there is the delicious Bardolino. To the north and northwest are the vineyards of the **Valpolicella** (where wine has been made since Roman times) and to the east, on the road to Vicenza, you'll find the white-wine makers of Soave.

To explore the **Valpolicella** area, follow the SS12 northwest out of town and turn off at **Parona di Valpolicella** to lose yourself along the narrow country roads that straggle north. About 8km northwest, stop in **San Pietro in Cariano** to visit the Pro Loco Valpolicella **tourist office** (% 045 770 19 20; www.valpolicellaweb.it; Via Ingelheim 7; h 9.30am-1pm & 1.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat), which has plenty of information, including a brochure on the vineyards. These dominate the countryside, sprinkled with villages, the

occasional 16th century villa and Romanesque church. Most vineyards close on Sunday.

From San Pietro, you might head a couple of kilometres east to [San Floriano](#) (where stands a 12th-century church). From there the SP34 road winds north along the east flank of the broad, vineyard-carpeted valley past [Negrar](#) (east over the hills closing off this part of the valley) and up through [Marano di Valpolicella](#). As you continue north towards [Fosse](#), the road rises towards the [Monti Lessini](#). From Fosse you could continue north into a small regional park (lots of walking trails) or bend back south through sleepy [Breonio](#) and on southwest to [Molina](#), where you have hours of pleasant walking around the cool waterfalls of the [Parco delle Cascate](#) (% 045 772 01 85; www.cascatemolina.it; adult/child €4.50/3; h 9am-7.30pm daily Apr-Sep, 10am-6pm Sun Mar & Oct), a limpid rush of water cutting a deep gash into the rocky woodland. The entire upper valley is a sea of cherry blossoms in early spring, and you'll notice that everything (brick houses, stone slab roofs, farm fences and more) is made of locally quarried stone, ranging from stained white and rose to weather-beaten grey, lending all the upper valley towns a strange and unique uniformity.

Back in the south of the valley, a few kilometres west of San Pietro, [Gargagnano](#) is especially known for that smoothest of Valpolicella reds, [Amarone](#). Next door to the west is [Sant'Ambrogio di Valpolicella](#), from which a 3km uphill detour to [San Giorgio](#) is a must. At the pretty hill village's heart is the dainty early Romanesque [Pieve di San Giorgio](#) (% 045 770 15 30; h 7am-6pm daily), with frescoes dating to as early as the 11th century, some features from the 8th century and a wonderfully crooked cloister. You can see the [Lago di Garda](#) beyond a cascade of terraced vineyards, and a handful of bars and eateries allow for a rest. Foodies will enjoy the [Trattoria Dalla Rosa Alda](#) (% 045 770 10 18; www.dallarosaldait, in Italian; meals €30-35; h Tue-Sat & Sun lunch). A bucolic haven serving fine local fare (try the gnocchi followed by beef braised in [Amarone](#) wine), it also offers 10 rooms for overnighters (singles/doubles €75/100).

Instead of screaming down the autostrada between Verona and Vicenza or rattling by on the train, exit at suave [Soave](#), a couple of kilometres north of the motorway. Again, the Scaligeri got to work here expanding the fortress that dominated the surrounding plains. The resulting [Castello](#) (% 045 68 00 36; adult/student

& child €4.50/3; h 9am-noon & 3-6.30pm Tue-Sun Apr-mid-Oct, 9am-noon & 3-5pm mid-Oct-Mar), just outside the centre of the medieval town but easily reached on foot (signposted) through gardens and vineyards, is a magnificent, soaring storybook ramble of crenellated walls, courtyards and central tower. All around, nice green grapes are readying themselves to become the famed [Soave](#) white wine.

Hang around the town long enough to try the local wine. For more information on this subject, check out [www.ilsoave.it](#). To savour some over a plate of excellent pasta – the *bigoli con pomodorini*, *lardo di Colonnata* ed *erba cipollina* (thick spaghetti in cherry tomatoes, bacon and finely chopped spring onion leaf) is fabulous – consider sitting down beneath the medieval vaults of [Enoteca Il Drago](#) (Piazza Antenna 1; meals €25-35; h lunch & dinner Tue-Sun). A word of warning: you can be waiting an hour (really) for the pasta to arrive.

Soave is 3km off the Venice–Milan train line. Get off at San Bonifacio and catch the APTV bus (line 30).

## PADUA (PADOVA) & AROUND

To the pious Catholic faithful, the student city of Padua (Padova, population 210,820) is a place of pilgrimage, city of the heavenly lost-and-found agent, St Anthony. Art-lovers also take the pilgrim path, anxious to behold the exquisite frescoes of master Giotto. Pilgrims to the latter are rather more numerous than those to the former, and Giotto's creations alone justify the effort. But the old city core, with its arcaded streets and grand squares, is replete with jewels.

In the 6th century BC the Veneti tribe had an important centre here, later known as Patavium under the Roman Empire. The Lombards made short work of the place in 602, virtually razing it. The comeback was slow, but by the 13th century, when it was controlled by the querulous counts of Carrara, Padua was a burgeoning independent city-state. The Carrara counts encouraged cultural and artistic pursuits (when they weren't busy warring with all and sundry), and established the Studium, the university's forerunner, in 1222. The foundation of the Basilica del Santo, dedicated to St Anthony, followed 10 years later. Venice put an end to the Carrara counts' passion for conquest

## TRANSPORT: PADUA (PADOVA) & AROUND

**Distance from Venice** Padua 37km; Arqua Petrarca 59km; Monselice 59km; Este 68km; Montagnana 83.5km

**Direction** West

**Bus** Regular [SITA buses](#) (% 049 820 68 11; www.sitabus.it) from Venice (€3.35, 45 to 60 minutes) arrive at Padua's [Piazzale Boschetti](#), 400m south of the train station. Local ACAP bus 10 will get you to [Piazza Cavour](#) from the train station, while bus 12 goes to [Prato della Valle](#), south of the city centre. Buy tickets (€1) at tobacconists and stamp them in the machines on the bus.

**Car** The A4 connects Venice and Padua. The A13, which connects Padua with Bologna, starts at the southern edge of Padua. The two autostrade are connected by a ring road.

**Train** The easiest way to Padua from Venice is by train (€2.70 to €10, 30 to 40 minutes). There's little to be gained from catching faster, more expensive trains on this short stretch.

when the Republic incorporated Padua into its growing land empire in 1405.

A five-minute walk south along [Corso del Popolo](#) (which later becomes [Corso di Garibaldi](#)) from the train station brings you to the [Cappella degli Scrovegni](#) (% 049 201 00 20; www.cappelladeglisrovegni.it; Giardini dell'Arena; adult/child under 6yr/child 6-17yr & seniors over 65yr €12/1/5, Mon €8/free/5; h 9am-10pm Mar-Oct, 9am-7pm Nov-Feb). [Enrico Scrovegni](#) commissioned its construction in 1303 as a resting place for his father. Giotto's fresco cycle, probably completed by 1306, illustrates the lives of Mary and Christ and is arranged in three bands. Among the most celebrated scenes in the cycle is the *Bacio di giuda* (Kiss of Judas). The series ends with the *Ultima cena* (Last Supper) on the entrance wall, and the Vices and Virtues are depicted around the lower parts of the walls.

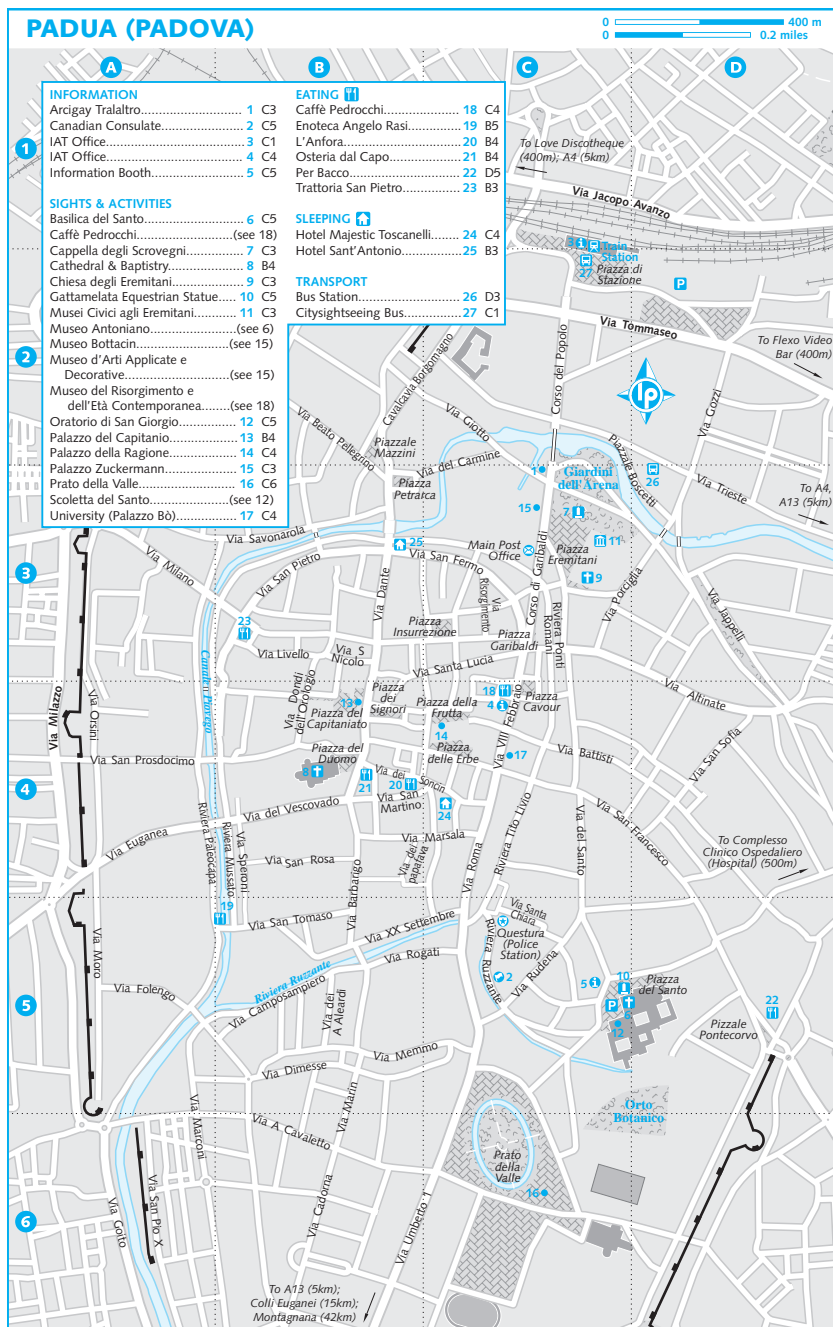
Keep in mind when the frescoes were painted – Giotto was moving well away from the two-dimensional figures of his medieval contemporaries. He was already on the cusp between Gothic art and the remarkable explosion of new creativity that was still decades away – the Renaissance.

You will be rushed through the chapel, but a new multimedia attraction on the site, allowing visitors to plunge into Giotto's era and learn more about his art, goes some way towards making up for this. Booking by phone or online at least 48 hours before visiting is obligatory (although if you get lucky you may find openings on the day), and you are given a maximum of 15 minutes inside the chapel. The night session (7pm to 10pm) costs €8/6/1 per adult/child of six to 17 years and seniors over 65 years/child under six years, or €12/6/1 if you get a *doppio turno* (double session) ticket that allows a 30-minute stay in the chapel.

The higher priced admission ticket is valid for the adjacent [Musei Civici agli Eremitani](#) (% 049 820 45 50; Piazza Eremitani 8; adult/child €10/6, incl Cappella degli Scrovegni €12/6; h 9am-7pm Tue-Sun), whose broad collection of 14th- to 18th-century Veneto art and largely forgettable archaeological artefacts includes a remarkable crucifix by Giotto. On the same ticket (same hours too) you can visit the nearby early-20th-century [Palazzo Zuckermann](#) (Corso di Garibaldi 33), home to the [Museo d'Arti Applicate e Decorative](#) on the ground and 1st floors and the [Museo Bottacin](#) on the 2nd. The former is a rich and varied collection with everything from fine antique furniture to 17th-century clothes, from ceramics to silverware, all spanning the Middle Ages to the late 19th century. The Museo Bottacin holds a private collection of art and coins donated to the city in 1865.

Just a few steps from the Cappella degli Scrovegni stands the early-14th-century [Chiesa degli Eremitani](#) (% 049 875 64 10; Giardini dell'Arena; h 8.15am-6.45pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon & 4.30-7pm Sun & holidays Mar-Oct, 8.15am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 4.15-7pm Sun & holidays Nov-Feb), an Augustinian church painstakingly rebuilt after being almost totally demolished by bombing in WWII. The remains of frescoes done by [Andrea Mantegna](#) during his 20s, said to be his chief masterpiece in Padua, are displayed in a chapel to the left of the apse. Most were wiped out in the bombing, the greatest single loss to Italian art during the war. The [Martirio di san jacopo](#) (Martyrdom of St James), on the left, was pieced together from fragments found in the rubble, while the [Martirio di san cristoforo](#) (Martyrdom of St Christopher), opposite, had been removed before the war.

[Corso di Garibaldi](#) spills into the similarly named piazza, the first of a series of interlocking squares in the heart of Padua. You might



want to stop for a coffee in **Caffè Pedrocchi**, just off Via VIII Febbraio on a little square adjoining Piazza Cavour. It has long been the central café in Padua. During the day you can visit the **Museo del Risorgimento e dell'Eta Contemporanea** (% 049 878 12 31; Galleria Pedrocchi 11; adult/child €4/2.50; h 9.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-6pm) on the grand 1st floor. The succession of rooms created in the first half of the 19th century sweeps in style from ancient Egyptian to Imperial. The museum recounts local and national history in documents, images and mementos, from the fall of Venice in 1797 until the republican constitution of 1848.

About 100m down Via VIII Febbraio is the **university**, the main part of which is housed in **Palazzo Bò** (% 049 827 30 47; Via VIII Febbraio; adult/student & child €5/2; h tours 9.15am-12.15pm Tue, Thu & Sat, 3.15-6.15pm Mon, Wed & Fri). Bò means 'ox' in the Veneto dialect and is named after an inn that previously occupied the site. Established in 1222, the university is Italy's oldest after the one in Bologna. Europe's first anatomy theatre opened here in 1594, and Galileo Galilei taught at the university from 1592 to 1610. The main courtyard and its halls are plastered with coats of arms of the great and learned from across Europe. Inside, aside from the beautiful, elliptical anatomy theatre, the highlights are a simple wooden lectern said to have been Galileo's and the Aula Magna, the main classroom until the 19th century (when the frescoes were added).

Turn back about 100m to the west and you wander into the contiguous Piazza delle Erbe and Piazza della Frutta. These 'herbs' and 'fruit' squares still live up to their names, with boisterous produce markets setting up daily. The squares are also lined by a cornucopia of shops selling all sorts of delicacies, interrupted by the occasional bar where shoppers and market workers can take a liquid break.

The two squares are separated by the majestic hulk of the **Palazzo della Ragione** (% 049 820 50 06; Piazza delle Erbe; adult/child €4/2, during temporary exhibitions €8/5; h 9am-7pm Tue-Sun), also known as the Salone for the grand hall that occupies its upper floor. Built in the 13th and 14th centuries, the building features frescoes by Giusto de' Menabuoi and Nicolò Mireto depicting the astrological theories of Pietro d'Abano. It is a beautiful and complex cycle, with images representing the months, seasons, saints, all sorts of animals, people and more. Unfortunately, much of what you see had to

## PADUAN ODDITIES

A popular saying dubs Padua (Padova) 'the city of the saint without a name, café without doors and the field without grass'. From 1831 to 1916, the owners of Caffè Pedrocchi kept the doors open 24 hours a day. As for the rest of the saying, the locals refer to St Anthony simply as Il Santo (The Saint), while the enormous open space called Prato della Valle (Field of the Valley) is indeed largely bereft of grass.

be restored after fire in 1420 and storm damage in 1756, meaning that most of the original work by Giotto and his acolytes, including the apparently stunning ceiling representation of the sky and stars, was lost. The grand wooden horse standing at one end was thought by many to have been the work of Donatello, but was in fact made in 1466 for a joust.

Piazza dei Signori is dominated by the 14th-century **Palazzo del Capitano**, the former residence of the city's Venetian ruler. South is the **cathedral** (% 049 66 28 14; Piazza del Duomo; h 7.30am-noon & 3.30-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 8am-1pm & 3.30-8.45pm Sun & holidays), built from a much-altered design by Michelangelo. Its 13th-century Romanesque **baptistry** (% 049 65 69 14; Piazza del Duomo; adult/child €2.50/1; h 10am-6pm daily) features a series of captivating frescoes of Old and New Testament scenes by Giusto de' Menabuoi, influenced by Giotto. The inside of the dome takes up classic medieval iconography, with Christ Pantocrator sitting in glory and holding an open book with the words: *Ego sum alpha et omega* (I am the beginning and the end). Ranks of angels and saints radiating around him are interrupted by an image of the Virgin Mary, whose blue mantle symbolises the divine maternity. Around them are images from the Creation. The rear apse wall has frescoes continuing the Creation story, along with others that recount the Redemption and the Apocalypse.

From Piazza del Duomo return to Piazza delle Erbe and head east along Via San Francesco. When you hit Via del Santo, turn south and you emerge in the grand square of the same name, dominated by the city's most celebrated monument and object of pilgrimage, the **Basilica del Santo** (Basilica di Sant'Antonio; % 049 824 28 11; Piazza del Santo; h 6.30am-7pm Nov-Feb, 6.30am-7.45pm Mar-Oct). Construction of what is known to the people of Padua as Il Santo began in 1232 and gave rise to an unusual hybrid result. With a

Latin Cross base, it has the brick Gothic feel of the great Franciscan and Dominican churches in Venice (the Frari and SS Giovanni e Paolo) but with a curious addition, a tight series of domes and towers.

The saint's tomb, bedecked by requests for his intercession to cure illness or thanks for his having done so, is in the imposing marble-laden Cappella del Santo, in the left transept, where it has been since 1310. The walls of the chapel are lined by nine splendid marble reliefs recounting miracles attributed to the saint.

The Florentine sculptor Donatello spent 10 busy years in Padua. He contributed various elements to the church, the most extraordinary of which are his *altar maggiore* (high altar) and the exquisite bronze *crocifisso* (crucifix).

Behind the high altar at the rear of the church radiates a series of nine chapels, mostly decorated in the 20th century. The central chapel is the Cappella del Tesoro (Treasury Chapel), a boisterous baroque addition to which the relics of St Anthony were transferred in 1745. It is not enough that the saint should be buried in the church: true to centuries-maintained Catholic tradition, parts of him are on show for the edification of the faithful. In this case you can admire his chin and grey-green tongue in two separate, exquisite gold monstrances. For the faithful, the tongue (set in such a way as though it were poking out of his mouth) became a particular object of pilgrimage and veneration, perhaps because in his lifetime he had been a convincing orator and mediator at times of civil strife.

Out the east door is the monastery attached to the basilica, with five cloisters. The oldest (13th century) is the Chiostro della Magnolia, so-called because of the magnificent tree in its centre. The *Museo Antoniano* (☎ 049 822 56 56; Piazza del Santo; adult/child €2.50/1.50; 9am–1pm & 2–6pm Tue–

Sun) holds a collection of art and religious objects done for the basilica and convent.

Donatello was responsible for the *Gattamelata equestrian statue* that presides over the centre of Piazza del Santo. This magnificent representation of the 15th-century Venetian *condottiero* (mercenary leader) Erasmus da Narni was done in 1453 and is considered the first great bronze of the Italian Renaissance. Erasmus' nickname, Gattamelata, translates as Honeyed Cat, apparently because he was as smooth as honey and as crafty as a cat.

On the south side of the piazza is the *Oratorio di San Giorgio* (☎ 049 875 52 35; Piazza del Santo 11; admission incl Scoletta del Santo €2; 9am–12.30pm & 2.30–7pm Apr–Sep, 9am–12.30pm & 2.30–5pm Oct–Mar), the burial chapel of the Lupi di Soranga family and delightfully simple Romanesque structure containing remarkably vivid 14th-century frescoes depicting tales of St George, St Catherine of Alexandria and St Lucy. That they are in such good condition is especially fortuitous given that the chapel was turned into barracks when Napoleon and his boys moved in to Padua in 1797. Next door is the *Scoletta del Santo* (☎ 049 875 52 35; Piazza del Santo 11; admission incl Oratorio di San Giorgio €2; 9am–12.30pm & 2.30–7pm Apr–Sep, 9am–12.30pm & 2.30–5pm Oct–Mar), with a series of works by various authors on the life of St Anthony. The three by a young Titian (done in 1510–11) stand out, partly because they depict the saint's activities in the background and other events in the foreground. Take for example a classic theme: *Il marito geloso pugnala la moglie* (The Jealous Husband Stabs his Wife). The vicious act takes precedence over the saint's intervention.

Just south of Piazza del Santo is the *Orto Botanico* (☎ 049 827 21 19; Via dell'Orto Botanico; adult/student & child €4/1; 9am–1pm & 3–6pm Apr–Oct, 9am–1pm Mon–Sat Nov–Mar), a Unesco World Heritage site. Purportedly the oldest botanical garden in Europe, it was first laid out in 1545. The old-

est tree in here is the so-called Goethe's palm, planted in 1585 and mentioned by the great German writer in his *Voyage in Italy*.

A short stroll southwest spreads out the odd, elliptical *Prato della Valle*, a space long used for markets. A slim canal around this 'square' is lined by 78 statues of sundry great and good of Paduan history. You may notice 10 further empty pedestals. Ten Venetian Doges stood here until Napoleon had them removed shortly after he took Venice in 1797.

## INFORMATION

**CitySightseeing buses** (☎ 049 870 49 33; www.city-sightseeing.it; adult/child €13/6) This outfit runs a one-hour circuit of the city from the train station from Easter to the end of September.

**Complesso Clinico Ospedaliero** (Hospital; ☎ 049 821 11 11; Via Giustiniani 1)

**IAT tourist office** Train Station (☎ 049 875 20 77; www.turismopadova.it; 9.15am–7pm Mon–Sat, 9am–noon Sun); **Vicolo Pedrocchi** (☎ 049 876 79 27; 9am–1.30pm & 3–7pm Mon–Sat) Pick up a copy of *Padova Today* here for the latest opening times.

**Information booth** (☎ 049 875 30 87; Piazza del Santo; 9am–6pm Mar–Oct)

**Main post office** Corso Garibaldi 25; 8.30am–6.30pm Mon–Sat

**Padova Card** (€14) A 48-hour pass that allows you to visit the Cappella degli Scrovegni (plus €1 booking fee), Musei Civici agli Eremitani, Palazzo della Ragione, Museo del Risorgimento e dell'Età Contemporanea at Caffè Pedrocchi, the cathedral baptistry, the Orto Botanico, a couple of minor chapels and Petrarch's house in Arquà Petrarca. It's available from tourist offices and the sights concerned. The ticket also gives discounts on other museums in and around Padua and free use of city public transport. A family museum card valid for 15 days for two adults and two children for all the above except the Orto Botanico costs €25.

**Police station** (☎ 049 83 31 11; Piazzetta Palatucci 5)

## EATING

**Enoteca Angelo Rasi** (☎ 049 871 97 97; www.angelorasi.it; Riviera Paleocapa 7; meals €50; 12pm–10pm Tue–Sun) This canal-side restaurant-winery offers snacks and refined meals in which the choice of wines is a key element.

**Per Bacco** (☎ 049 875 46 64; Piazzale Pontecorvo 10; meals €30–35; 12pm–10pm Tue–Sun) Try the *tagliatelle alla norcina con tartufo nero* (pasta with black truffles), a classic of Umbrian cuisine and a long-standing favourite here.

**Trattoria San Pietro** (☎ 049 876 03 30; Via San Pietro 95; meals €30; 12pm–10pm Mon–Sat, closed July) Modestly tucked away in a side street, this excellent restaurant serves up Veneto and Lombard cuisine. Try the *scaloppine ai carciofi* (veal filets with artichokes).

**Osteria dal Capo** (☎ 049 66 31 05; Via degli Obizzi 2; meals €30; 12pm–10pm Tue–Sat, dinner Mon–Sat) This carefully maintained *osteria* (restaurant-bar) is known throughout town as the perfect spot for quality traditional Veneto cooking. Try the *bavette ai frutti di mare* (a seafood pasta dish).

**L'Anfora** (☎ 049 65 66 29; Via dei Soncini 13; meals €25–30; 12pm–10pm Mon–Sat) A good-natured place where locals crowd the bar for a wine or two and perhaps a few snacks. Or you can sit down for a hearty meal. Fancy some tripe?

**Caffè Pedrocchi** (☎ 049 878 12 31; www.caffepedrocchi.it; in Italian; Via VIII Febbraio 15; 9am–10pm Sun–Wed, 9am–1am Thu–Sat) A spruced-up neoclassical façade fronts this classic café, which has been in business since the 19th century. It was one of Stendhal's favourite haunts in a town that left him otherwise indifferent.

## SLEEPING

**Hotel Majestic Toscanelli** (☎ 049 66 32 44; www.toscanelli.com; Via dell'Arco 2; s/d €115/175; a i ) Hidden away in a leafy corner of one of the lanes that twist away from Piazza delle Erbe, this hotel boasts classy rooms in various styles (ranging from Imperial to what the owners call '19th-century English'). All but one floor is nonsmoking.

**Hotel Sant'Antonio** (☎ 049 875 13 93; www.hotelsantantonio.it; Via San Fermo 118; s/d €66/90; a ) In this quiet location by an old city gate there are comfortable, airy rooms, and some cheaper singles (€42) with shared bathroom in the corridor.

**Koko Nor Association** (www.bbkokonor.it) This association can help you to find B&B-style accommodation in family homes as well as furnished apartments (it has 12 places on the books) for around €60 to €80 for two people. If you have trouble with the website, try www.bbbitetanhouse.it. The tourist office has a list of about 30 B&Bs.

## AROUND PADUA (PADOVA)

Southwest of Padua, along the A13 or the SS16, the *Colli Euganei* (Euganean Hills) are dotted with vineyards and good walking trails – ask at the IAT office in Padua for info and

## FROM PORTUGAL TO PADUA

St Anthony of Padua (Padua; 1195–1231) was actually Fernando of Lisbon, where he was born and spent most of his life. He first studied theology with the Augustinians, before switching to the mendicant Franciscan order and changing his name. His wanderings began at the age of 25, when he headed for Morocco to preach among the Muslims. This could easily have proven little more than a suicide mission, but before he had the chance to become a martyr, poor health brought him back to Europe, where he spent the ensuing years travelling and teaching in the less hostile environment of France and northern Italy. He earned great respect for his erudition and capacity to preach to the learned as convincingly as to more simple folk. St Anthony died in Padua, and the shrine built to him became a prime centre of pilgrimage. To this day countless miracles are attributed to him, as well as a knack for being the finder of lost articles.



maps. As you move around, you will encounter numerous villages, along with the occasional castle and abbey scattered about the countryside.

If you are driving (which you pretty much have to as public transport is abysmal in the area), follow the signposted *Strada dei Vini dei Colli Euganei* (Euganean Hills Wine Rd), which will take you on a tour of many vineyards.

The area is also famous for its *terme* (hot springs). The water passes underground from the low mountains of the Prealps north of Padua, where it is heated to more than 85°C and collects mineral salts. This water then bubbles up in the Colli Euganei area. The two main spa centres are **Abano Terme** and **Montegrotto Terme**.

The quiet, hilly, medieval village of **Arqua Petrarca** in the southern Colli Euganei was where Italy's great poet Petrarch (Petrarca, 1304–74) chose to spend the last five years of his life. You can visit his **house** (☎ 0429 71 82 94; Via Valleselle 4; admission €3; 11am–12.30pm & 3–7pm Tue–Sun Mar–Oct, 9am–noon & 2.30–5pm Tue–Sun Nov–Feb), which is set in cheerful gardens and contains various bits and bobs that purportedly had something to do with the scribe. To get to Arqua Petrarca, take one of up to three daily buses from Padua (€2.70, 55 minutes) en route to Este. Tickets purchased on the bus itself cost almost double.

**Monselice** (population 17,590), on the train line south from Padua, was once wrapped in five protective layers of fortifications. Only bits of the old walls remain, along with the tower of the *rocca*, or hilltop fort. The main point of interest is the 11th-century **castle** (☎ 0429 7 29 31; www.castellodimonselice.it; 1hr tours adult/child €5.50/4.50; 11am–noon & 3–6pm Tue–Sun Apr–Nov), actually a complex collection of buildings raised over several centuries. The oldest part of the site, the Castelletto, is what remains of the original fort. The grand Torre di Ezzelino is a 13th-century tower. By the time the 15th-century Palazzo Marcello was built, the castle had lost its defensive character.

West of Monselice along the road to Mantua (Mantova), **Este** (population 16,810) is another in the chain of fortified strongholds in the area. Padua's Carrara clan members were assiduous fortress builders – it seems they had a good number of enemies to keep at bay. Although the walls of their castle are in reasonable condition, the inside is pretty much a ruin. On the bumpy lane that climbs

northwards behind the castle is the **Villa Kunkler**, where Byron and Shelley spent time.

About 12km west of Este rise the magnificent defensive perimeter walls, dating to the 13th and 14th centuries, of the fortified plains town of **Montagnana** (population 9390). Its 2km of impressive crenellated walls are studded by 24 defensive towers and four gates. One of these towers has been converted into a unique youth hostel, the **Ostello Rocca degli Alberi** (☎ 0429 80 41 02; info@ostellomontagna.com; Via Matteotti 104, Montagnana; per person €16; 11 Apr–Sep).

Trains run from Padua to Montagnana (€3.15, 50 to 60 minutes) via Monselice and Este. The trip takes longer if you have to change in Monselice. If travelling by car from Padua, follow the SS16 south for Monselice and Arqua Petrarca, then branch west on the SS10 for Este and Montagnana.

## VICENZA & THE VILLAS

Caught between Padua and Verona, Vicenza (population 113,480) seems to come off as a runner-up. Well, the good people of Unesco don't see why, and so they include the city *holus-bolus* (along with several villas in the appealing countryside surrounding Vicenza) in the Unesco World Heritage List. What's the big deal? Palladio. The genius architect left his mark all over town and province.

Typical in many ways of the average northern Italian provincial town – prissy, chilly but with an undeniably easy charm in its old centre – Vicenza was already a prosperous centre as Roman Vicentia. It has retained a self-satisfied air, and as a busy textile and computer-parts centre is one of the country's wealthiest cities. It was swallowed up by the Venetian Republic in 1404 and it appears that many locals rather liked being part of the Venetian mini-empire, reflected in their predilection for Venetian-style Gothic mansions. But it is for the Renaissance and Palladio that the city is now prized.

From the train station, in the gardens of Campo Marzo, walk along Via Roma into Piazzale de Gasperi. From here Corso Andrea Palladio leads through the city gates into Piazza Castello. The square is lined with several grand edifices, including the oddly truncated **Palazzo Breganze** on the south side, designed by Palladio and built by Scamozzi (one of the city's leading 16th-century architects). Its couple of outsize columns look strange now, but had the building been completed it would

## TRANSPORT: VICENZA & THE VILLAS

**Distance from Venice** Vicenza 69km; Montebelluna Maggiore 87km; Sarego 91km; Lonigo 93km; Bagnolo 97km; Pojana Maggiore 90km; Noventa Vicentina 87km; Costozza 67km; Vancimuglio 59km; Trissino 96km; Valdagno 110km; Recoaro Terme 120km; Thiene 89km; Lugo di Vicenza 97km; Caldogno 77km

**Direction** West

**Car** Vicenza is on the A4 tollway connecting Venice with Milan. The slower (but cheaper!) SR11 also connects Vicenza with Venice (via Padua) and Verona. There is a large car park near Piazza Castello and the train station.

**Train** Regular trains arrive from Venice (€4 to €10, 45 minutes to 1½ hours) and Padua (€2.70 to €9, 15 to 25 minutes). You can reduce the cost by getting slower *regionali* (slow, local) or *interregionali* (long-distance) trains. Other trains connect Vicenza with Milan, Verona, Treviso and smaller towns in the north.

have been one of the city's most imposing structures. Corso Andrea Palladio continues northeast from the square and is the old town's central artery.

The Church has its main square in Piazza del Duomo, but the **Duomo** itself, rebuilt after WWII, is of comparatively little interest. Allied bombs destroyed the original and only a few of the artworks could be saved.

In nearby Piazza dei Signori rises the immense **Basilica Palladiana** (☎ 0444 32 36 81; Piazza dei Signori; 11 only for temporary exhibitions), which Palladio began in 1549 on top of an earlier Gothic building – the slender 12th-century bell tower is all that remains of the original. Palladio's **Loggia del Capitaniato**, at the western side of the piazza on the corner of Via del Monte, was left unfinished at his death.

Contrà Porti, northwest off Corso Andrea Palladio, is one of the city's finest streets. **Palazzo Thiene** (☎ 0444 54 21 31; entrance Contrà San Gaetano Thiene; reserve ahead, admission free; 11 9am–noon & 3–6pm Tue–Wed Oct–Apr, 9am–noon & 3–6pm Wed & Fri, 9am–noon Sat May–Sep), by Lorenzo da Bologna, was originally intended to occupy the entire block. Palladio's **Palazzo Barbaran da Porto** (☎ 0444 32 30 14; Contrà Porti 11; adult/student €5.50/3.50; 11 10am–6pm Tue–Sun Jul–Dec, 10am–6pm Fri–Sun Apr–Jun) features an elegant double row of columns and is the richly decorated home to a museum and study centre devoted to Palladio (which frequently hosts architecture exhibitions). Palladio also designed **Palazzo Isoppo da Porto** (Contrà Porti 21), which remains unfinished. **Palazzo Valmarana** (Corso Antonio Fogazzaro 18) is considered one of his more eccentric creations, with the combination of two orders of pilasters in the main façade.

Heading north along Corso Andrea Palladio and left into Contrà di Santa Corona, you reach the **Chiesa di Santa Corona** (11 8.30am–noon & 3–6pm Tue–Sun, 4–6pm Mon), established in 1261 by

the Dominicans to house a relic from Christ's crown of thorns. Inside are the *Battesimo di Gesù* (Baptism of Christ) by Giovanni Bellini and *Adorazione dei magi* (Adoration of the Magi) by Veronese.

Corso Andrea Palladio ends at the **Teatro Olimpico** (☎ 0444 22 28 00; Corso Andrea Palladio; admission by combined-sights ticket; 11 9am–5pm Tue–Sun Sep–Jun, 9am–7pm Tue–Sun Jul & Aug), started by Palladio in 1580 and completed by Scamozzi after the former's death. Considered one of the purest creations of Renaissance architecture, the theatre design was based on Palladio's studies of Roman structures. Scamozzi's remarkable street scene, stretching back from the main façade of the stage, is modelled on the ancient Greek city of Thebes. He created an impressive illusion of depth and perspective by slanting the street up towards the rear of the set. The theatre was inaugurated in 1585 with a performance of *Oedipus Rex* but soon fell into disuse – the ceiling caved in and the theatre remained abandoned for centuries until 1934, when it was restored and reopened. Entry to Teatro Olimpico is by combined-sights ticket (p231).

The nearby **Museo Civico** (☎ 0444 32 13 48; Palazzo Chiericati, Piazza Matteotti 37/39; admission by combined-sights ticket; 11 9am–5pm Tue–Sun Sep–Jun, 10am–6pm Tue–Sun Jul & Aug), located in the Palladian Palazzo Chiericati, contains works by local artists as well as those by the Tiepolos and Veronese. The **Museo Naturalistico e Archeologico** (☎ 0444 32 04 40; Contrà di Santa Corona 4; admission by combined-sights ticket; 11 9am–5pm Tue–Sun Sep–Jun, 10am–6pm Tue–Sun Jul & Aug) has a modest collection of local ancient artefacts. The **Museo del Risorgimento e della Resistenza** (Viale X Giugno 115; admission by combined-sights ticket) is dedicated to Italian reunification and the Resistance in the latter stages of WWII. You'll find the museum southeast of the train station.

## VICENZA

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The sober baroque façades of the **Gallerie di Palazzo Leoni Montanari** (% 800 578875; www.palaz.zomontanari.com; Contrà di Santa Corona 25; adult/student €3.50/2.50, or combined-sights ticket; 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) belie a more extravagant interior. Long a private mansion and seat of a bank, the building now contains a collection of more than 400 Russian icons (top floor) and mostly 18th-century Venetian paintings (1st floor). Among the outstanding works on show are some by Canaletto and Pietro Longhi. There are frequent temporary exhibitions, too.

South of the city, the **Basilica di Monte Berico** (% 0444 32 09 98; Piazzale della Vittoria; 10am-12.30pm & 2.30-7pm Mon-Sat, 6am-7pm Sun & holidays) is set atop a hill that offers magnificent views of the city below. The basilica was built in the 18th century to replace a Gothic structure, itself raised on the supposed site of two appearances by the Virgin Mary in 1426. An impressive 18th-century colonnade runs uphill to the church, roughly parallel to Viale X Giugno. Bus 18 (€1) runs here from Via Roma.

A 20-minute walk down Viale X Giugno and east along Via San Bastiano will take you to the **Villa Valmarana 'ai Nani'** (% 0444 32 18 03; www.vil.lavalmarana.com; Via dei Nani 2/8; admission €8; 10am-noon & 3-6pm Tue-Sun Mar-Oct, 10am-noon & 2-4.30pm Sat & Sun Nov-Feb). The villa features brilliant frescoes by Giambattista and Giandomenico Tiepolo. The 'ai Nani' (dwarves) refers to the statues perched on top of the gates surrounding the property.

A path leads on about 500m to Palladio's Villa Capra, better known as **La Rotonda** (% 0444 32 17 93; Via Rotonda 29; gardens €3, villa €6; 10am-noon & 3-6pm Tue-Sun Mar-Nov, villa 10am-noon & 3-6pm Wed Mar-Nov). It is one of the architect's most admired – and most copied – creations, having served as a model for buildings across Europe and the USA. The name comes from the low dome that caps this square-based structure, each side fronted by the columns of a classical façade. Bus 8 for Debba or Lumignano (€1.50) from Via Roma stops nearby. Groups can book to visit outside the normal opening hours; the price is hiked up to €13 per person in this case.

## INFORMATION

**Azienda di Promozione Turistica office** (APT; www.vicenzae.org) Piazza dei Signori 8 (% 0444 54 41 22; 10am-2pm & 2.30-6.30pm); Piazza Matteotti 12 (% 0444 32 08 54; 10am-1pm & 2-6pm)

**Combined sights ticket** The Card Musei (valid for three days) costs €8 and gives you entry to the Teatro Olimpico, Museo Civico (Palazzo Chiericati), Museo Naturalistico e Archeologico and the obscure Museo del Risorgimento e della Resistenza.

**Main post office** (Contrà Garibaldi 1; 10am-6.30pm Mon-Sat)

**Ospedale Civile** (Hospital; % 0444 99 31 11; Viale Ferdinando Rodolfi 37)

**Palladio website** (www.cisapalladio.org) A site dedicated to all things Palladian.

**Police station** (% 0444 33 75 11; Viale Giuseppe Mazzini 213)

## EATING

**Al Bersagliere** (% 0444 32 35 07; Contrà Pescheria 11; meals €35-40; 10am-11pm Mon-Sat) This is a traditional *osteria* where you can eat *cicheti* (snacks) at the bar or proceed to the cosy little tables for seasonal cooking. It's big on sausages cold and warm.

**Antico Guelfo** (% 0444 54 78 97; Contrà Pedemuro San Biagio 92; meals €35-40; 10am-11pm Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) The ever-changing menu in this inviting *osteria* with muted yellow lights is loaded with fantasy. Consider the *ricotta gnocchi* or roast guinea fowl.

**Zi Teresa** (% 0444 32 14 11; Contrà Sant'Antonio 1; pizza €8-12, meals €35-40; 10am-11pm Thu-Tue) A popular and cavernous place, 'Auntie Teresa' offers a big range of succulent pizzas and a chunky seafood risotto that tastes of the sea.

**Antica Casa della Malvasia** (% 0444 54 37 04; Contrà delle Morette 5; meals €35; 10am-11pm Tue-Sun) This den has been around since 1200. The grub is hearty Veneto fair, with *gnocchi*, *baccalà* (salted cod) and meat dishes predominating. Drinking is still a primary occupation in a locale that has changed little in all those centuries – on offer is an array of 80 types of wine (especially Malvasia varieties) and around 100 types of grappa!

## SLEEPING

**Casa San Raffaele** (% 0444 54 57 67; www.albergosanraffaele.it; in Italian; Viale X Giugno 10; d up to €75) Located in a former convent behind the colonnade leading to the Basilica di Monte Berico, this is a charming spot to spend the night. Rooms are functional.

**Albergo Due Mori** (% 0444 32 18 86; www.hotelduemori.com; Contrà do Rode 26; s/d up to €48/80) The rooms at

this central cheap, with tiled floors, ceiling fans and antiquish bedheads, are basic, but the build is clean and was given a once-over in 2002. There's disabled access.

## VILLA ROUTES

Villa hunters don't need to stop at La Rotonda. As Venetian patricians studded the Riviera del Brenta with their sumptuous summer palaces (see *opposite*), so the rural areas around Vicenza began to mushroom with country residences as early as the 15th century. The Venetian Senate forbade the high and mighty of Vicenza, or any other of the mainland cities under Venetian control, from building castles. Venice feared a landscape dotted with stout forts occupied by potentially independent-minded individuals. And so Vicenza's great and good cottoned on to the villa-construction fad. Many of the thousands that were built remain, although most are inaccessible. The APT office (p231) in Vicenza can provide reams of information about the villas most worth visiting. **FTV buses** (% 0444 22 31 15; www.ftv.vi.it) serve the bulk of these locations from Vicenza's bus station, near the train station, but not always with great frequency.

Drivers should have little trouble planning an itinerary. A southern loop route of about 110km would see you taking the SR11 west of Vicenza and turning north on the SS246 to **Montecchio Maggiore**, dominated by high hilltop twin castles and graced by one of the region's most elegant country mansions, the **Villa Cordellina Lombardi** (% 0444 90 81 41; Via Lovara 36; adult/student €2.10/1; h 9am-1pm Tue-Fri, 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct), 3km east of the Duomo (take Via De Gasperi). From there, turn back south and follow the SP500 towards **Sarego**, 3km short of which is the somewhat dilapidated Palladian complex of **Villa Trissino**. A couple of kilometres south of Sarego through rolling vineyard country, **Lonigo** was long known for its horse and cattle fare and is home to a trio of villas, the most striking of which is Scamozzi's hilltop **Rocca Pisana** (% 0444 83 16 25; h visits by prior appointment only). It's a nice drive up (follow signs to the Rocca for 2km). About 4km further south, the village of **Bagnolo** is home to the proud Palladian **Villa Pisani Ferri De Lazara** (% 0444 83 11 04; admission €7; h 10am-noon & 2-6pm Apr-Sep, visits must be booked ahead) and its gardens. From there, a series of winding country lanes leads southeast to **Pojana Maggiore** and another of

Palladio's designs, **Villa Pojana**, just south out of town on the road to Legnago. Three kilometres east, in **Noventa Vicentina**, rises **Villa Barbarigo**, a striking tall pile with two massive tiers of columns and adorned with fabulous frescoes. Nowadays it's home to the town hall. Just west, the northbound SS247 takes you past **Finale** (just south of Agugliaro) and its splendid **Villa Saraceno** (% 0444 89 13 71, Landmark Trust in UK 01628-825925; www.landmarktrust.org.uk; Via Finale 8, Finale di Agugliaro; building per night UK€300-800; s p ). Set back on a quiet enclosure off the SS247, this restored 16th-century Palladian country villa is a noble choice of lodgings. Up to 16 people can stay, and there's a pool. From April to October parts of the building can be visited by the public between 2pm and 4pm on Wednesday. Buses run to Finale di Agugliaro from Vicenza bus station.

About 22km up the road towards Vicenza, turn off west for the ancient and pretty village of **Costozza**, blessed with several villas. The star attraction is the complex known as the **Ville Da Schio** (gardens €5, tickets from neighbouring Botte del Covolo wine bar; h 9.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sun), fine buildings set in magnificent gardens. In the shadow of the **Colli Berici** hills (some great walking), the village is worth a stroll and wine stop in a handful of *enoteche* (wine bars).

A few kilometres north, at Longare, take the country road heading northeast over the motorway to reach, some 8km away and on the SR11 road, **Vancimuglio**. Here spreads the slightly weather-worn **Villa Chiericati Da Porto Rigo** (in private hands but observable from the road). About 12km separate you from Vicenza to the west.

A northern circuit could again see you start with Montecchio Maggiore, from where you would head north along the Valdagno road (SS246) with a first stop in **Trissino** (take a detour along the SP87 for a few kilometres) for the memorable, ivy-covered **Villa Trissino Marzotto** (% 0445 96 20 29; villa €5, gardens €5; h visits by appointment only Sep-Jul), set in sculpted gardens high up a narrow winding lane. After passing through the town of **Valdagno**, 12km north, you enter some pretty countryside with the so-called Piccole Dolomiti (Little Dolomites) ranged around **Recoaro Terme** and reaching an altitude of 2259m. A winding road takes you 10km northeast of Recoaro into another pretty valley from where the SS46 takes you a further 10km east into **Schio**, interesting above all for what remains of its 19th-century textile factories and workers'

housing. Another 10km east lands you in **Thiene** and its **Villa Da Porto Colleoni Thiene** (% 0445 36 60 15; www.castellodithiene.com; Corso Garibaldi 2; adult/child €6/4; h tours 3-5pm Sun & holidays mid-Mar-mid-Nov), about 3km south of the town centre. A side trip of about 8km to the northeast (Via Breganze and Fara Vicentino) leads to **Lugo di Vicenza** and its **Villa Godi Valmarana Malinverni** (% 0445 86 05 61; www.villagodi.com; admission €6; h 3-7pm Tue, Sat & Sun Jun-Sep, 2-6pm Tue, Sat & Sun Mar-May, Oct & Nov), Palladio's first villa project. Five kilometres south of Thiene, you could stop in **Villaverla**, with a couple of interesting mansions, or simply proceed south to **Caldogno** for another Palladian pleasure dome, **Villa Caldogno Nordera** (now part of the local cultural centre). From there it's a short drive back south into Vicenza.

## RIVIERA DEL BRENTA

As wealthy Venetians turned from seafaring merchants into landlubbers they flashed around their wealth in the hinterland, building fine villas, mostly as summer estates. More than 100 are scattered along the River Brenta, which passes through Padua and spills into the Venetian lagoon.

Many villas are dilapidated and closed, a sorry reflection of the fall from grace of many a Venetian grandee in the Republic's twilight years. Mind you, some prospered,

and a number of the villas date only to the 19th century, by which time Venice was under Austrian control (until 1866). Today, mere mortals may snoop around a handful of the most outstanding of these magnificent mansions.

No sooner do you roll out of the nightmare industry-scape of Marghera than you find yourself heading for **Malcontenta**, a Palladian trademark. The riverside façade, with its Ionic columns and classical tympanum, echoes the ancients that inspired him. The **Villa Foscari** (1571; **Map p60**; % 041 520 39 66; www.lamalcontenta.com; Via dei Turisti 9; admission €7, groups of 12 or more can book out of season for per person €8; h 9am-noon Tue & Sat May-Oct) is also known as La Malcontenta (the Malcontent), supposedly because a female family member was exiled here for fooling around with people other than hubby. Its interior is remarkable only for the frescoes with which it is covered. They mostly depict scenes from classical literature.

Next up is an early-18th-century rococo caprice lying just west of **Oriago**, the **Villa Widmann Foscari** (% 041 42 49 73; Via Nazionale 420, Mira Porte; admission €5; h 10am-6pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr & Oct, 10am-5pm Sat, Sun & holidays Nov-Mar). Built by a trading family, the Serriman (of Persian origin), it was later taken over by the Widmann clan and given the French-rococo flavour it exudes today. Inside, the most impressive element is the grand Sala delle

## TRANSPORT: RIVIERA DEL BRENTA

**Distance from Venice** Villa Foscari 12km; Villa Widmann Foscari 16km; Villa Barchessa Valmarana 16km; Villa Pisani 26km; Oriago 14km; Mira 18.5km; Strà 29km

**Direction** West

**Boat** The luxurious **Burchiello** barge plied the River Brenta from Venice to Padua in the 17th and 18th centuries. Today's modern **Burchiello** (% 049 820 69 10; www.ilburchiello.it; adult/12-17yr/6-11yr/under 6yr 1 way €71/47/33/ free; h Mar-Oct) cruises up and down the river between Venice and Strà (the price includes optional tours of Villa Foscari, Villa Barchessa Valmarana or Villa Widmann; lunch is extra). Departures from Venice (Riva degli Schiavoni) are on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday; those from Strà are on Wednesday, Friday and Sunday. Shuttle buses connect Strà with Padua's (Padova's) main bus station. Prices come down in July and August. Call for information, or try travel agents in Venice. **Battelli del Brenta** (% 049 876 02 33; www.battellidelbrenta.it; half- & full-day tours per person €32.50-71) offers a range of similar trips. Its main day-long excursion offers stops at more villas (entry fees included in price). You could also try **Delta Tour** (% 049 870 02 32; www.deltatour.it).

**Bus** Regular Azienda Consorzio Trasporti Veneziano (ACTV) buses running between Venice and Padua (via Mestre, Marghera, Oriago, Mira, Dolo and Strà) stop at or near the villas. Take bus 53 (€4.20, less to intermediate stops) from Piazzale Roma headed for Padua via Malcontenta to visit the Villa Foscari and then proceed west. You'll need some patience if you intend to do this excursion by bus.

**Car** From Venice follow the signs out of Mestre through Marghera to Malcontenta. From there follow the SR11 for Strà.

Feste (Ballroom), sumptuously decorated and ringed halfway up by an ornate gallery. The garden is littered with 18th-century statuettes of nymphs and cherubs.

Across the Brenta from Villa Widmann Foscari is the **Villa Barchessa Valmarana** (€ 041 426 63 87; www.villavalmarana.net; admission €6; h 10am-6pm Tue-Sun, Mar-Oct), which was built a century later and is noteworthy mainly for its frescoes. Similarly alluring are the frescoes in the **Villa Barchessa Alessandri** (€ 041 41 57 29; Via Nazionale 64, Mira), further along in Mira, but this was closed at the time of writing.

**Villa Pisani** (€ 049 50 22 70; Via Alvise Pisani 7, Strà; adult/EU citizens 18-25yr/under 18yr €5/2.50/free, grounds only €2.50/1.20/free; h 8.30am-7pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 9am-4pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar), also known as **Villa Nazionale**, is by far the grandest. It is set in extensive gardens just short of Strà and was completed in 1760 for Doge Alvise Pisani. It was later used by Napoleon as a temporary residence and in more recent times hosted Hitler's first meeting with Mussolini. It is quite an exercise in family trumpet-blowing. From the outside statues at the entrance to Tiepolo's ceiling fresco (a pictorial eulogy to the Pisani clan), it is a flashy display of wealth.

In Strà itself is the imposing 17th-century **Villa Foscarini Rossi** (€ 049 980 10 91; www.villafoscarini.it; Via Doge Pisani 1/2, Strà; adult/12-18yr/under 12yr €5/3.50/free; h 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Mon-Thu, 10am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Fri, 11am-6pm Sat, 2.30-6pm Sun & holidays Apr-Oct, 9am-1pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar), constructed for one of Venice's senior families. Among the many architects involved was Vincenzo Scamozzi (who worked from designs by Palladio), although the present look results partly from a later neoclassical reworking. The restored mansion, surrounded by carefully manicured grounds, hosts a couple of permanent displays, one dedicated to Rossimoda, which for decades has produced footwear for the biggest names in fashion (from Yves Saint Laurent to Fendi), and the other a private art collection of Luigino Rossi, who happens to be behind the shoes and now owns the villa. A separate and more modest building, the **Foresteria** (which once hosted distinguished guests), is used for high-flying conventions.

Other noteworthy villas are **Villa Sagredo** (€ 049 50 31 74; www.villasagredo.it, in Italian; Via Sagredo 3a, Vigonovo; admission free; h 5-9.30pm Tue-Fri, 9am-10pm Sat & Sun) in Vigonovo and **Villa Grad-enigo** (€ 049 876 02 33; Oriago di Mira; adult/student €4/3; h groups by appointment) in Oriago. The former is

a romantic spot for weddings and is also used for conventions.

On Sunday and holidays in June, September and October, guided visits are sometimes organised to further villas in the area as part of the **Ville Aperte (Open Villas)** initiative. Approach the APT in Venice (see p259) for more information.

## INFORMATION

**IAT tourist office** Padua (€ 049 875 20 77; www.turismopadova.it; train station, Padua; h 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun); **Mira Porte** (€ 041 560 06 90; Villa Widmann Foscari, Via Nazionale 420; h 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr, 10am-6pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 10am-5pm Sat, Sun & holidays Nov-Mar)

**Main APT office** (Map pp62-3; € information 041 529 87 11; www.turismovenetia.it; Piazza San Marco 71f, Venice; h 9am-3.30pm Mon-Sat)

## SLEEPING

**Villa Rizzi-Albarea** (€ 041 510 09 33; www.villa-albarea.com; Via Albarea 53; d €200-280; s p ) One of the oldest of the Brenta villas, this former monastery (the church is still intact) is now a luxury inn near Dolo (it's 3km north of the Dolo exit from the A4 autostrada). Set in 2 hectares of parkland, the mansion offers plush rooms with antique furnishings.

## TREVISO & AROUND

For fashion-lovers around the world, the best thing to come out of Treviso (population 82,110) is the United Colors of Benetton (yes, there's a huge store in the heart of town). A distant second is radicchio, the local, bitter, red lettuce. For locals the best thing coming in is probably Ryanair (see p242), hauling in loads of tourists to discover this delightful riverside town before making for the glories of Venice. Those who skip Treviso, an easy train ride from Venice, are missing a treat.

The Città d'Acqua (City of Water), as local tourist bods would have it, is a miniature version of Venice. Such comparisons are more touching than realistic, but that doesn't make Treviso, through which the River Sile meanders, any less worth visiting.

From the train station, head north along Via Roma (over the canal), past the bus station and across the bridge (the nicely placed McDonald's on the river is an unmistakable landmark), and keep straight along Corso del

## TRANSPORT: TREVISO & AROUND

**Distance from Venice** Treviso 30km; Oderzo 55km; Conegliano 58km; Vittorio Veneto 73.5km

**Direction** North

**Bus** The Treviso bus station is on Lungosile Mattei, near the train station in Piazzale Duca d'Aosta. ACTV buses connect Venice with Treviso, and **La Marca buses** (€ 0422 57 73 11) link Treviso with other towns in the province. Buses travel to Oderzo (€2.35, 30 to 35 minutes), Conegliano (€3.10, 45 minutes) and Vittorio Veneto (€3.70, one hour five minutes).

**Car** Take the SS13 from Venice (Mestre) to Treviso and on to Conegliano and Vittorio Veneto. The A27 autostrada is faster but bypasses all three. For Oderzo, take the SS53 northeast from Treviso.

**Train** Trains from Venice to Treviso (€2.20 to €4.50, 25 to 30 minutes) make better sense than the bus. Other trains link the town with Belluno (via Conegliano and Vittorio Veneto), Padua (Padova) and major cities to the south and west.

Popolo. At Piazza della Borsa, veer left down Via XX Settembre and you arrive in the heart of the city, **Piazza dei Signori**.

Piazza dei Signori is dominated by the fine brick **Palazzo dei Trecento**, the one-time seat of city government. Beneath the vaults you can stop for coffee and wistfully contemplate the worn 16th-century **Fontana delle Tette** (Tits Fountain), from whose breasts red and white wine flowed for three days each year on the appointment of a new town governor. The practice ended with the fall of Venice in 1797, itself enough reason for the locals to regret the passing of La Serenissima. The medieval main street is the colonnaded Via Calmaggiora, which leads to the **Duomo** (Piazza del Duomo; h 7.30am-noon & 3.30-7pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-1pm & 3.30-8pm Sat & Sun), the town's massive cathedral whose main source of interest lies in the frescoes inside by Il Pordenone (1484-1539).

Backtrack to Piazza dei Signori and head east (around and behind the Palazzo dei Trecento), and you will soon find yourself in a tight warren of lanes that leads to five delightful bridges across the Canal Cagnan, which runs roughly north-south and spills into the River Sile. Treviso is a comparatively leafy town, and this is particularly the case at some points along the canal. You can also see the occasional mill wheel (the one by Vicolo Molinetto still turns). Try to catch the bustling atmosphere of the morning *pes-caria* (fish market), which occupies a small island here.

While on the right bank of the canal make for the **Museo Civico di Santa Caterina** (€ 0422 54 48 64; Via di Santa Caterina; adult/student & senior €3/1; h 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Tue-Sun). The church and its attached convent and cloisters house many of

the city's art treasures. In the church itself are remarkable frescoes attributed to Gentile da Fabriano (who worked in the early 15th century). The beautiful Cappella degli Innocenti contains remarkably fresh and vivid frescoes by two contemporary artists, depicting the lives of Christ and the Virgin Mary. To these have been added the extraordinary fresco cycle by Tomaso da Modena (1326-79) on the life and martyrdom of St Ursula, recovered late in the 19th century from another already partly demolished church.

Over two floors of the former convent is part of the eclectic collection of Luigi Bailo, a 19th-century friar who made it his life's work to collect ancient artefacts and artworks to preserve the memory of Treviso's past. The collection starts with an archaeological section, proceeds with Romanesque statuary, and continues with a series of single paintings by Lotto, Titian, Tintoretto, Guardi, Rosalba Carriera and others.

Tomaso da Modena also left frescoes in the imposing **Chiesa di San Nicolò** (Via San Nicolò; h 7am-noon & 3.30-7pm daily) on the other side of town. The star attraction is the **Sala del Capitolo Domenicano** (€ 0422 32 47; Piazzetta Benedetto XI 2, admission by donation; h 8am-6pm daily) in the seminary alongside the church. Enter and follow the directions across a cloister to the room, which is adorned with the portraits of 40 Dominican friars by Tomaso da Modena, all intent on copying illuminated manuscripts. One of them, on the right as you enter, has a magnifying glass in his hand. This 14th-century painting is thought to be the first-ever pictorial record of a reading glass.

Where the Canal Cagnan empties into the Sile is a particularly pleasant corner, with part of the city walls intact. In summer you can

## BENETTON'S BURGEONING BUSINESS

Back in 1965 a Treviso lad by the name of Luciano Benetton and his younger siblings, Giuliana, Gilberto and Carlo, got into the rag trade. They could not have known that 40 years later they would have more than 5000 stores in 120 countries, an average €120 million in annual profit (on turnover of €1.9 billion) and a brand name that sticks in the mind. Concentrating on attractive, young fashion (with lines in children's gear, perfumes and home wares thrown in) their two main brands, the United Colors of Benetton and Sisley, have established themselves worldwide. Other brands include Undercolors of Benetton (underwear, beachwear and snoozewear), Playlife (leisure wear) and Killer Loop (street design clothes). This is in part due to the daring advertising campaigns cooked up at Fabrica, a modern complex not far from the Benetton headquarters north of Treviso.

Benetton is not just about snazzy dressing. Through the parent company, Edizione Holding, the family has direct or indirect interests in Italian highways (Autostrade), telecoms, the Autogrill highway restaurant chain, Rome and Turin airports, investment companies and important land-holdings in Europe and, notably, Argentina (where the family owns 900,000 hectares of Patagonia and almost 300,000 head of livestock).

take a **boat cruise** on the *Silis* or *Altino* down the Sile to the Venetian lagoon and back. The tours are by reservation only – call or ask at the ATP tourist office ([below](#)).

## INFORMATION

**APT tourist office** (☎ 0422 54 76 32; <http://turismo.provincia.treviso.it>, in Italian; Piazzetta Monte di Pietà 8; 𠂇 9am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Tue-Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Sat & Sun, 9am-12.30pm Mon) In a square adjacent to Piazza dei Signori.

**Boat Cruises** (☎ 0422 78 86 63, 0422 78 86 71) For cruises along the River Sile.

## EATING

Many restaurants stop serving lunch by 2pm and dinner by 10pm.

**All'Antico Portico** (☎ 0422 54 52 59; [www.anticoportico.it](http://www.anticoportico.it); Piazza Santa Maria Maggiore 18; meals €40-45; 𠂇 lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) Fine for lunch but better still for a more elaborate evening meal, this place doesn't seem much from the outside. Within, the timber ceiling and clattering of antique bits and bobs makes it instantly likeable. You can opt for hearty mainland Veneto dishes and such specialities as *lumache al burro con aglio e prezzemolo* (snails done in butter, garlic and parsley).

**All'Antico Pallone** (☎ 0422 54 08 57; Vicolo Rialto 5; meals €20-25; 𠂇 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Duck down an alley for this hole in the wall. Wine and *cicheti* form the backbone of offerings at All'Antico Pallone, but a limited selection of pasta and main courses are also on offer. Grab a tiny timber table in the conspiratorial penumbra and huddle.

**Ristorante Alle Becchiere** (☎ 0422 54 08 71; Piazza Ancilotto 10; meals €20-25; 𠂇 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch

Sun) This historic central eatery offers a mostly local menu. Take a seat in the hushed dining room, where you will be swiftly served at linen-draped tables. The owners claim that tiramisu was invented here!

## SLEEPING

**Albergo Il Focolare** (☎ 0422 5 66 01; [www.albergoilfocolare.net](http://www.albergoilfocolare.net); Piazza Ancilotto 4; s/d €65/95) With a new name and newly renovated this is one of the few choices within the old city, just off Piazza dei Signori, and it's a pleasant option indeed. Rooms have dark parquet floors, a soothing creamy décor, light white curtains and muted elegance. Three of the doubles have canal views.

## AROUND TREVISO

**Oderzo** (population 18,710), 25km northeast of Treviso, is a microcosm of its grander neighbour. The central Piazza Grande is flanked by the 15th-century cathedral and a fine clock tower, and is frequently the scene of classical-music recitals in summer. The town's handful of peaceful canals, crisscrossed by little bridges bearing pretty flower boxes, is inevitably reminiscent of Treviso. For information try the **APT tourist office** (☎ 0422 81 52 51; Calle Opitergium 5; 𠂇 9am-12.30pm Tue & Wed, 9am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Thu-Sun).

North of Treviso, on the road to Belluno, call in at **Conegliano** (population 35,630), dominated by a castle (which you can reach on foot or by car). For information, head for the **APT tourist office** (☎ 0438 2 12 30; Via XX Settembre 61; 𠂇 9am-12.30pm Tue & Wed, 9am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Thu-Sun). The centre of town, a few minutes' walk straight ahead down Via Carducci from the train station, is notable for the long Scuola dei

Battuti on Via XX Settembre, decorated inside and out with frescoes. The cathedral, which you enter from the Scuola, is noteworthy for an altarpiece painted by local painter Cima da Conegliano in 1492–93. Treviso province provides rivers of the region's *prosecco*, a light white that comes in three general types, *spumante* (bubbly), *frizzante* (sparkling) and still.

The train from Venice via Treviso stops at Conegliano and then proceeds to the strange animal that is **Vittorio Veneto** (population 29,320). For information, try the **APT tourist office** (☎ 0438 5 72 43; Viale della Vittoria 110; 𠂇 9.30am-12.30pm Tue & Wed, 9am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Thu-Sun). Actually a composite of two towns (Ceneda and Serravalle), Vittorio Veneto is most comfortably visited with your own transport. As you arrive from the south, do *not* follow signs for the *centro* (centre). These take you to the modern part of the conglomerate, which lacks any real interest. Instead, follow signs for **Ceneda**, whose main attractions are the sweeping Piazza Giovanni Paolo I and **Castello di San Martino**, about a 1km hike up into the leafy hills. To reach the picturesque huddle of houses that is **Serravalle**, you need to follow signs for Belluno. These apparently

lead you out of Vittorio Veneto, but just as you get that leaving feeling you stumble on this northernmost, and prettiest, part of the sprawling municipality.

## BASSANO DEL GRAPPA & AROUND

Known above all for its firewater – grappa – and to a lesser degree for its ceramics, Bassano del Grappa (population 41,750) sits astride the River Brenta south of the first line of hills that are a prelude to the Dolomites. But wait! The people of Bassano are particularly proud of their white asparagus! To art-lovers, the name will ring another bell. The Da Ponte family of Renaissance painters, known to us now as the Bassano, came from here. Fashion lovers may also recognise the name, since the Diesel clothing company based itself here rather than in the fashion capital Milan.

The appealing old centre of town and a chance to get inside the grappa story are enough of an incentive to come here (a journey easily made by train from Venice), but

## DETOUR: BELLUNO & THE DOLOMITES

Those with a roving heart and a yen for grand mountain scenes will be sorely tempted to scoot up the motorway to Belluno (population 35,600), an attractive town at the foot of the mighty Dolomites. A long day trip via Treviso is technically feasible (it's about two hours' drive north of Venice along the A27 tollway) but you are better off taking a couple of days and using Belluno as a base to explore the mountains. They offer a feast of summer hiking and winter skiing.

The heart of the old town is formed by **Piazza del Duomo**, dominated on one side by the 16th-century Renaissance **Cattedrale di San Martino**, the **Palazzo Rosso**, from about the same period, and the **Palazzo dei Vescovi**.

Stretching away to the northwest is the **Parco Nazionale Dolomiti Bellunesi**, a beautiful national park laden with outdoors opportunities. Six Alte Vie delle Dolomiti (high-altitude walking trails) pass through the territory surrounding Belluno, and along them you will find *rifugi* (mountain huts), on Rte 1 in particular, where you can stay at the end of a day's hiking. Rte 1 stretches between Belluno and Lago di Braies in the neighbouring Trentino-Alto Adige region. The huts are generally open from late June to late September.

The **IAT tourist office** (☎ 0437 94 00 83; [www.infodolomiti.it](http://www.infodolomiti.it); Piazza del Duomo 2, Belluno; 𠂇 9am-12.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm) has further information. A privately-run website on Belluno province is [www.dolomiti.it](http://www.dolomiti.it).

## Cortina Chic

About 50km north of Belluno and connected by bus is the chic ski resort of Cortina d'Ampezzo (population 6210), for wintertime visitors to Venice with an urge to rip down a few fashionable Italian slopes. And fashionable they are. Cortina attracts the *crème de la crème* of the Italian high society, and local snappers are always on the lookout for TV celebs such as Alba Parietti, Natalia Estrada and Simona Ventura. Cortina sits in the Ampezzo bowl and is surrounded by stunning mountains such as Cristallo, the Gruppo di Sorapiss-Marmarole, Antelao, Becco di Mezzodi-Croda da Lago, Nuvolau-Averau-Cinque Torri, Tofane, Pelmo and Civetta.

The resort boasts 140km of runs of all levels of difficulty. A day pass costs up to €37/34/26 (adult/senior/child) depending on the season. Check out the ski website for the entire Dolomites area ([www.dolomitisuperski.com](http://www.dolomitisuperski.com)). A direct winter bus runs from Venice's Piazzale Roma (3½ hours).

## TRANSPORT: BASSANO DEL GRAPPA & AROUND

**Distance from Venice** Bassano del Grappa 77km; Asolo 64.5km; Possagno 74.5km; Cittadella 54.5km; Castelfranco del Veneto 42km

**Direction** Northwest

**Bus** Regular **SITA buses** (% 049 820 68 11; www.sitabus.it) to Padua (€3.95, one hour) from Bassano train station call in at Cittadella (€2.70, 20 minutes). Up to 11 **La Marca buses** (% 0422 43 21 25) a day between Bassano and Montebelluna stop below Asolo. Get off at Ca' Vescovo (€2.60, 20 minutes). You need to get the little orange shuttle bus from there to reach the centre, otherwise it's a long walk. Up to nine **CTM buses** (% 0423 49 34 64; www.ctm spa.com, in Italian) a day run from Bassano to Possagno (€3.10, one hour). Get tickets for all except SITA buses from the newspaper stand at the Bassano bus station. SITA bus tickets can be purchased on the bus. As this is largely a train-replacement service, train tickets are valid on the Bassano–Padua (Padova) run.

**Car** The most direct route from Venice is the Castelfranco del Veneto road leading northwest from Mestre. You could also combine tours and head first to Treviso, then arc northwest towards Montebelluna to make for Asolo (and maybe Possagno) before proceeding further west to Bassano del Grappa and returning to Venice via Cittadella and Castelfranco. It's a slightly exhausting itinerary but possible.

**Train** The easiest way to Bassano from Venice is by train on the Venice–Trento line (€4, 1¼ to 1½ hours). A train from Padua (€3.15, one hour to 1¼ hours) is another option. Castelfranco is on the Venice–Bassano line (€3.15, 50 minutes to 1¼ hours from Venice).

around Bassano radiate half a dozen intriguing objectives, from the hill village of Asolo to the fortified plains towns of Cittadella and Castelfranco del Veneto.

From Bassano train station it's about a five-minute walk west to the edge of the old town and the APT office. Buses halt a couple of hundred metres south of the tourist office at Piazzale Trento; from there another five-minute walk west takes you to the heart of the old centre. The River Brenta, crossed by the Ponte degli Alpini, flows to the west.

The centre of Bassano is composed of two sloping, interlinking squares, Piazza Garibaldi and Piazza Libertà. In the latter, the winged lion of St Mark stands guard on a pedestal to remind you of who was long in charge here.

In the **Museo Civico** (% 0424 52 22 35; Via del Museo 12, Bassano; adult/student incl Museo della Ceramica €4.50/3; 11 9am–6.30pm Tue–Sat, 3.30–6.30pm Sun), attached to the Chiesa di San Francesco on Piazza Garibaldi, you can see an assortment of items, including paintings by members of the Bassano clan and archaeological finds such as ancient Greek ceramics and bronze figurines. Among the Bassano collection, which takes up a floor, are 17 canvases by Jacopo Bassano. Also on display is a section devoted to the sculptor Canova, with his letters, books, drawings and plaster casts. A separate ceramics collection with more than 1000 porcelain pieces, the **Museo della Ceramica**

(% 0424 52 49 33; Palazzo Sturm, Via Schiavonetti; adult/student incl Museo Civico €4.50/3; 11 9am–12.30pm & 3.30–6.30pm Tue–Sat, 3.30–6.30pm Sun Apr–Oct, 9am–12.30pm Fri, 3.30–6.30pm Sat & Sun Nov–Mar), is housed in Palazzo Sturm on the banks of the Brenta and can be visited on the same ticket.

Follow Via Matteotti north from Piazza Libertà towards the remains of **Castello Ezzelini**, the stronghold that belonged to the medieval warlords of the same name.

Via Gamba slithers downhill from Via Matteotti to the River Brenta and the covered bridge designed by Palladio and known as the **Ponte degli Alpini** (aka Ponte Vecchio), after the mountain troops who rebuilt it in 1948. (Retreating German soldiers had seriously damaged the bridge at the tail end of WWII.) Via Gamba and the bridge are lined with ceramics shops and a few grappa outlets. Throw in some bars and snack joints and it makes a pleasant stroll. The views across to old Bassano from the far riverbank alone justify the walk.

While by the bridge, pop into the Poli grappa shop with its **Poli Museo della Grappa** (% 0424 52 44 26; www.poligrappa.com; Via Gamba 6, Ponte Vecchio; admission free; 11 9am–7.30pm), which outlines the drink's history. You'll have trouble resisting the chance to buy an elegant bottle or two of the clear, high-octane liquid (which comes in a surprising array of styles). Although grappa is made all over Italy and indeed inferior versions are distilled well beyond the peninsula,

the people of the Veneto have been doing it since at least the 16th century. In 1601 an institute of grappa distillers was even created in Venice! It is highly likely that Ernest Hemingway acquired a taste for the stuff here, while serving as an ambulance volunteer with the Italian army in WWI. Just across the bridge, downstairs in the bar of the same name (open 8am to 2am) is the **Museo degli Alpini** (admission free), dedicated to the mountain troops who rebuilt the bridge. You will find all sorts of memorabilia from the two world wars and other scraps Italy got itself into since unification in 1870. The wooden army skis from the 1940s do not make skiing look fun!

A short walk south along Via Ferracina brings you to the previously mentioned Museo della Ceramica.

Back on the grappa theme, Nardini has a laboratory centre 3km south of central Bassano on the SP47 (it's on the right) road to Padua. Known as the **Bolle di Nardini** (% 0424 22 77 41; Via Madonna Monte Berico 7), the most eye-catching element are two transparent ellipsoid spheres used as labs. Call ahead to visit.

East of Bassano, **Asolo** (population 8590), with its position high in the hills and surrounded by fields, farms and woods, makes it an enchanting village. Caterina Corner, the ill-fated Venetian queen of Cyprus, was given the town and surrounding county towards the end of the 15th century in exchange for her abdication (see below). The writer Pietro Bembo attended Caterina's salons and, perhaps in search of a hint of that same atmos-

phere, Robert Browning also spent time in Asolo. For information, head for the **tourist office** (% 0423 52 90 46; Piazza Garibaldi 73; 11 9am–12.30pm Mon–Fri, 3–6pm Tue, Thu & Fri, 9.30am–12.30pm & 3–6pm Sat & Sun).

Piazza Garibaldi forms the town centre, from where streets wind up in all directions between the tight ranks of golden-hued houses that lend this place so much of its charm. The **cathedral** lies below and just to the south of the square. It contains a few paintings by Jacopo Bassano and Lorenzo Lotto. Caterina Corner lived in the **castle**, now used as a theatre. An arduous climb up Via Collegio from Piazza Brugnoli will get you to the **rocca**, the town's medieval fortress. The walk north out of town to the **Cimitero di Sant'Anna** is rewarding for the views over the lush, green countryside. Eleonora Duse (1858–1924), a whirlwind actress romantically involved with the dashing nationalist poet Gabriele d'Annunzio, was buried here. Indeed, the town is linked to more than its fair share of illustrious women. The remarkable British traveller and writer Freya Stark (1893–1993), in between her daring Middle Eastern wanderings, always came home to Asolo. Her tomb lies just a few along from that of Duse. In the town's **Museo Civico** (% 0423 95 23 13; Via Regina Cornaro 74; adult/senior & under 26yr/under 6yr €4/3/free; 11 10am–noon & 3–7pm Sat & Sun) you can see a section devoted to her life and travels.

Birth and resting place of Antonio Canova, Italy's master of neoclassical sculpture, **Possagno** (population 2150) is a good place to get

## A QUEEN CORNERED

In 1468, as 14-year-old Caterina Corner was escorted in pomp out of the family mansion in San Polo to the Palazzo Ducale, she must have wondered what was coming next. *Niente di buono* (nothing good) would have been the response of wise onlookers. Betrothed to 28-year-old James, the usurper king of Cyprus, Caterina found herself four years later pregnant, widowed and surrounded by enemies in her new island home.

James' untimely (and suspicious) death convinced Venice that it must act to protect its growing interest in the island. Captain General Pietro Mocenigo was dispatched first to fortify Venetian forts and then later to reverse a coup against the queen. The Cypriots were none too enamoured of de facto Venetian rule on their island, but after the coup attempt, government was effectively in the hands of two Venetian *consiglieri* (councillors), ostensibly in the service of the queen.

After the death of her infant son in 1474, Caterina's problems only increased. Plots against her from Cypriot nobles came thick and fast, and her protectors, the Venetians, virtually held her prisoner. In 1488, Venice decided enough was enough. Cyprus was threatened by Turkish invasion and the latest plots against Caterina were proving insufferable. It was decided to absorb the island into the Venetian Empire. For this, Caterina had to be convinced to abdicate.

This she did with some reluctance, but she had little choice. For her trouble she was compensated with a mainland fief centred on Asolo and a generous life pension. She returned to her Venetian home only in 1509, where she died the following year. She kept her title of queen until the end. Less than a century later, Venice would lose Cyprus to the Turks anyway.

## DETOUR: MAROSTICA'S LIFE-SIZE CHESS MATCH

For the most colourful game of chess you are ever likely to see, you need to be in the quiet medieval town of Marostica (population 13,280) on the second weekend of September in even-numbered years (2008, 2010 and so on). You know you have almost arrived (if coming from nearby Bassano) when you see the jagged line of battlements that climbs the hill from Marostica's town centre to the upper castle.

Pretty enough to warrant a brief stop in its own right, Marostica comes into its own for the biennial Partita a Scacchi (Chess Match). Back in 1454, they say, two knights challenged each other to a duel for the hand of the fair Lionora, elder daughter of the town's ruler, Taddeo Parisio. The latter, not wanting to lose either warrior, banned the duel and ordered them to 'fight' it out in a grand game of chess using real people on a 'board' at the gates of the lower castle. The two knights ordered the moves and the winner got Lionora. The loser didn't come off too badly, since he wed Parisio's equally radiant younger daughter.

The carefully choreographed event today is as colourful as the original must have been, with an assembly of players and other characters in period costume. If you can't be here for the match (for which a seat can cost €20 to €80), you can admire the costumes in **Castello da Basso** (Piazza Castello; admission €1; 10am-noon & 2.30-6pm except holidays). Marostica is a 15-minute bus ride from Bassano.

More information can be found at the **tourist office** (☎ 0424 7 21 27; www.marosticascacchi.it; Piazza Castello 1, Marostica).

an idea of how Canova worked. The **Gipsoteca** (☎ 0423 54 43 23; www.museocanova.it; Possagno; adult/student €4/3; 11am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sat, 9am-12.30pm & 3-7pm Sun) is home to a long series of clay models and other preparatory pieces for his finished work (you can see some statues and reliefs by Canova in Venice's Museo Correr, p70).

Before you reach the Gipsoteca, you'll have been astonished by the rather outsize **Tempio** (☎ 0423 54 40 40; admission free; 11am-noon & 3-6pm Tue-Sun), to all intents and purposes the parish church, that Canova was considerate enough to leave to his town. Finished in 1832, it could be described as neo-mongrel-classical, as it is an amalgam of Greek and Roman models.

Southeast of Bassano lie a couple of fortified plains towns worth a quick stop. **Cittadella** (population 19,420), a 14km bus ride south of Bassano on the busy SP47 to Padua, is enclosed by 1.5km of towering red-brick walls and a moat. Of the four gates, the northern Porta Bassano is the most elaborate. Padua raised the fort in the 13th century to face off the one built by Treviso at **Castelfranco del Veneto** (population 32,830), 10km east, towards the end of the 12th century.

Castelfranco (Free Fort) could not have been an overly sought-after address, as the then rulers of Treviso exempted from all taxes anyone prepared to move in. From its construction until 1339, when it was absorbed into Venice's mainland empire, Castelfranco del Veneto remained a hotly contested site and frequently changed hands. Padua laid siege to it barely 10 years after its construction. More

than 60 years after Venice took control of Castelfranco, the lion of St Mark was finally raised over Cittadella in 1405. For information, try the **tourist office** (☎ 0423 49 14 16; Via F M Preti 66; 11am-12.30pm Mon-Fri, 3-6pm Tue, Thu & Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Sat & Sun).

The square-based walls of Castelfranco are less impressive than the circular version at Cittadella, but the town has an extra claim to fame as the birthplace of the mysterious painter Giorgione. Little is known about his life, and only half a dozen works can be definitively attributed to him. One of them, the *Madonna col bambino in trono e santi francesco e liberale* (Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints Francis and Liberale), is in the **cathedral** (11am-noon & 3-6pm) in the centre of town.

## INFORMATION

**APT office** (☎ 0424 52 43 51; Largo Corona d'Italia 35, Bassano; 11am-1pm & 2-6pm)

## EATING & DRINKING

**Ca' Derton** (☎ 0423 52 96 48; Piazza d'Annunzio 11, Asolo; meals €40-50; 11am-8pm) It does tempting local dishes with a refined touch. How about *zuppa coada* (a pigeon and bread soup) and some *coniglio arrosto farcito al cotechino* (roast rabbit stuffed with sausage)? There's also a fine wine list and dessert menu.

**Nardini** (☎ 0424 22 77 41; Ponte degli Alpini 2, Bassano; 11am-8pm) Sit down among the venerable wine barrels and sip grappa at this wonderful bar right on the old-city-centre side of the bridge.

**Ristorante Ottone** (☎ 0424 52 22 06; Via Matteotti 50, Bassano; meals €25-30; 11am-8pm) Lunch & dinner Wed-Sun & lunch Mon) For a leap back in time, this characterful spot (in business since 1870) just off Piazza della Libertà is good for a hearty Hungarian goulash or grilled horse meat.

## SLEEPING

**Hotel Villa Cipriani** (☎ 0423 52 34 11; www.sheraton.com; Via Canova 298, Asolo; d €190-390) Dating from the 18th century, this villa overlooking Asolo is one of Italy's great luxury retreats. The views are splendid, as is the villa.

**Villa Ca' Sette** (☎ 0424 38 33 50; www.ca-sette.it; Via Cunizza da Romano 4, Bassano; s/d €130/210) Home to a renowned restaurant since the 1950s, this 18th-century mansion and its dependencies, 1km north of central Bassano, form a marvelous retreat set in tranquil grounds.

**Hotel Duse** (☎ 0423 5 52 41; www.hotelduse.com; Via Browning 190, Asolo; s/d €60/120) The elegant four-storey hotel has lovely rooms and is smack in the heart of this inspiring hill town.

**Hotel Castello** (☎ /fax 0424 22 86 65; Via Bonamigo 19, Bassano; s/d up to €55/90) In the shadow of the old castle walls, this is the only hotel within the old town, huddled up to the medieval tower and presiding over an animated square. Inside, there are just 11 charming rooms with parquet floor, some with exposed ceiling beams, and loads of light.

## THE ADRIATIC COAST

The Adriatic coast, spreading east and gradually north away from Venice, is lined with popular local beach resorts. They tend to be crowded on summer weekends but not so bad during the week. Quite a few foreigners flock to them too, using the resorts as the core of their summer holiday and chucking an excursion to Venice. These places are pleasant enough, but the northern Adriatic is not the place to plan a classic Mediterranean beach holiday.

**Lido di Jesolo**, the strand a couple of kilometres away from the main town of Jesolo, is far and away the Venetians' preferred beach. The sand is fine and clean, the water is OK, and the place hops in summer with several dance clubs grooving through the night (see p194).

**Jesolo** (population 23,580) marks the northern end of a long peninsula that becomes Litorale del Cavallino as you head south and culminates in Punta Sabbioni, which together with the northern end of the Lido di Venezia

## TRANSPORT: THE ADRIATIC COAST

**Distance from Venice** Lido di Jesolo 45km; Caorle 65km

**Direction** Northeast

**Boat** In summer (roughly June to September), ferry services to Venice are sometimes available but cannot be guaranteed from one year to the next.

**Bus** Azienda Trasporti Veneto Orientale (ATVO) buses run from Piazzale Roma in Venice to Jesolo (one way/return €3.70/6.50, 70 minutes) and Caorle (one way/return €4.60/8.10, 1½ hours).

**Car** Driving up this way can be a nightmare on mid-summer weekends and holidays, and even midweek is sometimes fraught because of the intense traffic. Take the SS14 from Mestre.

forms the first of the three Adriatic entrances into the Venetian lagoon.

The beaches tend to be covered in umbrellas, recliners and the people using them. The area also has camping grounds and plenty of hotels. The whole is predictably short on character but can make a fun diversion from heavy-duty Venetian sightseeing – sort of a sunny Blackpool-near-Venice.

Nothing is left to remind you of the ancient roots of **Eraclea**, now a small agricultural town on the way from Jesolo to Caorle, itself 30km northeast from Jesolo.

In the 1st century BC **Caorle** (population 11,800) was a Roman port and it remains a busy fishing centre today. Small but proud, it dropped resistance to Venetian pressure and passed under the paws of St Mark's lion only in the 15th century. The centre of the medieval town is watched over by the extraordinary cylindrical bell tower of the 11th-century cathedral. Although they haven't gone to quite the lengths of the people of Burano p113), the townsfolk take a special pride in keeping their houses gleaming with fresh coats of paint in an array of bright colours.

The beaches are busy but OK and the whole place has a restrained vibe that sets it apart from the more soulless Jesolo. The old town centre is blessed with a handful of places to lay down your weary head, and restaurants abound.

For Adriatic Coast information, try the **Palazzo del Turismo** (☎ 041 37 06 01; www.turismojesolo.eraclea.it) in Piazza Brescia, Jesolo, or the **APT office** (☎ 0421 8 10 85) in Caorle.

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