

Storylines

Alpine Inns & Lodges (“Refuges”)

Trentino’s 140 alpine inns or lodges (known as “refuges” or “rifugi”) cater for the needs of a million visitors a year. Depending on location and altitude, the lodges serve hikers, skiers and mountaineers – as well as unsporty visitors drawn to the hearty home cooking in these cosy inns. Linked by a widespread network of trails, “refuges” present ideal bases for hiking trips, and often have facilities for rock-climbing, mountaineering or horse-riding in the vicinity. Contrary to popular myth, not all lodges are perched on inaccessible peaks: most are set in strategic spots easily reached along marked paths or mule tracks, or even by cable car and snowcat. Ravenous hikers can take comfort from the fact that many popular “refuges” are also rustic alpine inns, often accessible by road. Such lodges were appreciated by Pope John Paul II, a keen walker and skier, before ailing health precluded any more alpine trips. In this egalitarian environment, even he would have been subject to the same clear rules and spartan conditions: snug dormitories lined with bunk beds, and friendly chat that ceases at the strict 10pm curfew.

One of the most appealing “refuges” is named in honour of the English mountaineer, Francis Fox Tuckett, who made an early ascent of the Brenta Dolomites in 1871, seven years after helping lead the first ever group to cross the San Martino Dolomites in Trentino. Set in desolate terrain at the foot of a glacier, an hour’s walk from the scenic Groste pass and cable car, this sought-after spot has a climbing camp and mountaineering base which make use of the sheer rock faces nearby. The most atmospheric but relatively demanding hiking route in the Brenta Group conveniently starts at the “refuge”.

► *Request the Storyline on **The British Mountaineering Tradition**.*

Such natural amphitheatres as the Brenta also provide the spectacular backdrop for the summer concerts that come under the banner of *The Sounds of the Dolomites*, Trentino’s main music festival. Prestigious musicians perform classical or contemporary pieces to an audience gathered on the grassy banks beside the chosen “refuge”, lake or lowering peak. The soaring music is chosen to symbolise the adventurous spirit of those who seek to conquer mountain peaks. It is from here that numerous trails lead off into the Dolomites, although many visitors prefer to combine the open-air concert with a meal in a charming inn. ► *For information on **The Sounds of the Dolomites**, request the **Summer Storyline** while, for a list of alpine lodges, request the **Refuges** booklet.*

Well-maintained alpine inns are the pride of the region, whether cast in the guise of charming Tyrolean-style lodges (known as *rifugi*) or former dairies and converted cowsheds (known as *malghe*). Whatever their name, the best of these rustic places share the same commitment to a welcoming alpine atmosphere and genuine home cooking, with hearty meals of game, pork, polenta, salami, mushrooms, cheeses and honey. These “refuges,” which started out as basic alpine retreats from the elements, tend to occupy natural beauty spots, whether in flower-bedecked valleys or overlooking the majestic

peaks. Where once these glorified sheds provided little more than a bed for the night for lone mountaineers, or shelter for poor peasants tending their flocks in alpine pastures, today's "refuges" serve several purposes.

While all inns retain their original spirit, some still maintain their original function, with a number of beds available to summer hikers and mountain-bikers, winter sports enthusiasts or mountaineers. Accommodation is basic rather than spartan in "refuges" that have welcomed numerous well-known guests, though none as famous as the present Pope. With the right spirit of adventure, a stay in a "refuge" can be a memorable experience, from the sharing of tales of adventure to the dormitory-style accommodation and 10pm curfew. The manager is always an alpine guide knowledgeable about everything from weather conditions to recommended routes, natural hazards and emergencies. ► *See the section on safety, clothing and equipment in the **Refuges** booklet.*

However, many "refuges" have moved on from their rugged origins to embrace a broader clientele, and serve delicious food at reasonable prices while retaining their cosy, rustic charm. These lodges also play an important role in the sporting life of the region, with many set near ski slopes, rock-climbing areas or walking trails. Some have British or German sporting echoes, including the Francis Fox Tuckett refuge (*see above*), named in honour of the British mountaineer who helped chart Trentino.

Most lodges are designed to serve winter and summer visitors, from the serious outdoors specialist to the casual tourist coming up on a cable-car to admire the view before settling down to a serious lunch. However, some inns close in the spring/autumn so check before planning a trip to Trentino. Even so, the majority of inns have to be open from 20th June to 20th September, altitude and weather conditions permitting. Access is another important aspect to bear in mind since it ties in with the visitors' levels of fitness, means of transport, and time available: while many inns are easily accessible by road or by cable car, others require a bit of physical effort or planning, including walks of varying duration and difficulty. In winter, certain popular refuges can also be reached on skis, by snowcat or by skidoo. ► *Further details can be found in the **Refuges** booklet, including details of which inns serve as hostels or restaurants - available from the Trentino London office. Also request the two Storylines on **Trentino in Winter**.*

Alpine inns ("refuges") renowned for their food and wine:

Trentino's inns generally provide a better eating experience than can be found in rival alpine resorts. However, the following can be singled-out as delightful examples of their kind, and are particularly popular with winter sports enthusiasts. ► *Further details can be found in the **Refuges** booklet, available from the Trentino London office.*

***In the Val di Fiemme area:** Caserina, a former shepherd's hut overlooking the Pampeago pistes that sweeps skiers from Monte Agnello, draws hungry visitors to its tasty grills and grappas. The inn, and the top of the Monte Agnello chairlift, mark the start of an exciting descent on skis, which can also be done by torchlight.

***In the Val di Fassa (Canazei) area:** Rifugio Fuchiade (tel: 0462-574281), in the Tre Valli ski area, set above the pass known as Passo San Pellegrino, is one of the best-known inns in Trentino. It can be reached off-piste (snow conditions permitting) or by snowcat or skidoo. The specialities include cold cuts, stews, soups and traditional Ladin dishes. In terms of Ladin folklore, another intriguing inn is Cima Uomo, noted for its home cooking and for its staff dressed in Ladin costume. (► *See the 25 Strange Things Storyline* for more about Ladin culture and ethnic groups in Trentino)

***In the San Martino di Castrozza area:** Malga Ces (tel: 0439-68145) in San Martino is one of the best-known inns in Trentino, noted for its mushroom risotto, game and cold cuts. Alternatively, Malga Fratezza (tel: 0439-68470) is an appealing inn that can be reached by skidoo; typical dishes are barley soup, pork dishes, and ricotta gnocchi. Malga Rolle (tel: 0439-68216), an inn accessible by car but also situated close to the ski slopes, is noted for its hearty dishes, from polenta to alpine cheeses and sausages.

***In the Madonna di Campiglio area:** Rifugio Stoppani (tel: 0465-440115), is an alpine eyrie at Groste, the highest of Madonna's pistes. Here you can sample wild boar at 2000 metres altitude. Closer to Folgarida-Marilleva, the Malga Zeledria (tel: 0465-440303) has great mushroom dishes, especially risotto.

***In the Passo Tonale area, close to the border with Lombardy:** Mirandola is a distinctive restaurant which can be reached by snowcat or via the Valbiolo chairlift from Passo Tonale. This cosy place once served peasants who scythed the local meadows but is now a gentrified-rustic restaurant serving filling Trentino dishes. Alternative inns noted for their friendly atmosphere and genuine fare are Malga Valbiolo and Rifugio Negritella. ► *See the Taste of Trentino Storyline* for more details on food and wine in Trentino. Also consult the website for specific restaurants: www.trentino.to.

Using the “refuge” as a base for walking, hiking and climbing:

In Trentino, the network of alpine lodges is the ideal way of exploring the region. Walkers are well-served by marked trails that are adapted to different levels of skill, from Sunday softies to serious hikers equipped with safety harnesses, ropes and protective helmets. ► *Request the Walking and Hiking in the Dolomites Storyline. Also, for booklets and brochures on walking and mountain-biking trails all over Trentino, contact the London Trentino office to let us know which areas you are most interested in.*

Environmental benefits of exploring Trentino:

This is Italy's most environmentally aware region, with myriad clean lakes, the constant monitoring of Lake Garda, and motor boats banned from Trentino waters. As well as expanses of sheer wilderness, Trentino also has the largest national park in the country, part of almost 20 percent of territory given over to protected reserves. A green consensus ensures that a balance is struck between safeguarding select habitats and preserving virgin forests, while providing a livelihood for the locals. For many, life is linked to the land, with alpine pastures tended by shepherds; mountain guides trained in the skills of free climbing or mountaineering; and ski instructors doubling up as summer forestry officials or rafting instructors. Protection of the environment and sustainable tourism also

goes hand in hand with a sound legal framework. Compared with most Italian regions, Trentino has a healthy respect for both natural and man-made laws: deep in the woods, even mushroom-picking is regulated by the feared *funghi* police. ► *See the Storyline entitled **Twenty-Five Strange Things You Didn't Know about Trentino.***

The Year of the Mountains:

The international “Year of the Mountains” is upon us, a United Nations-inspired venture that seeks to combine celebration of the world’s natural wonders with promotion of specific mountain ranges, alpine sports and scientific research into sustainable development. In Italy, the “Year of the Mountains” will be a high-profile affair, with mountainous regions vying with one another in staging spectacular events. The Italian committee has already decided to floodlight five significant mountains in honour of the occasion. The event has also been heralded by the introduction of an Italian “mountains credit card”, with 50 per cent of all profits going to support struggling alpine communities. While far from struggling, Trentino is fully behind any initiatives that favour alpine culture, sustainable development and tourism. Moreover, as the self-declared home of the Dolomites, Trentino is well-placed to promote its greatest assets – so expect to see the peaks celebrated in words, music, wine and sporting events.

► *For more details of the events connected with this international jamboree, see www.mountains2002.org. For details of how Trentino plans to celebrate the year, check with the London Trentino office – and **keep your diary free for 16th May and 13th June!***