

# ***Storylines***

## **Health & Fitness in Trentino**

**Visit the highest spa in Europe, imbibe the waters, swelter in a steam bath, wallow in the mud, or simply take a roll in the hay - Trentino has its fair share of weird and wonderful treatments. Yet after an invigorating holiday in the region, even visitors wary of water cures will come away with a new approach to spa culture – although the hay may occasionally linger in unusual places....**

Trentino prides itself on a harmonious way of life, which results in healthy living and a balanced approach to work and leisure. And the locals tend to be good advertisements for this rugged alpine lifestyle: seemingly fit young foreigners can expect to be overtaken by wizened Trentino pensioners on a gentle summer Sunday climb in the Dolomites. A combination of the pure mountain air and the locals' love of the outdoor life all help, as does a balanced diet, a sporty nature, and an energetic approach to exercise, whether winter skiing or summer walking.

Given the importance of the great outdoors in Trentino, generally the approach to fitness is a holistic one. However, as in the rest of Italy, there is some reluctance to go down the “alternative” path, whether in homeopathic or complementary medicine. Compared with English-speaking countries, there is a narrower emphasis on conventional cures, to the exclusion of other approaches. In short, Trentino is not the place for the latest costly health fads, whether London-style Ayurvedic medicine, esoteric massages and meditation or New York-style “rejuvenating” Botox-injections or colonic irrigation. And some might say that the region is the healthier for it.

On the other hand, what the region lacks in trendiness, it more than makes up for in a willingness to embrace healthy outdoor pursuits on a holiday. Health and fitness fanatics from the UK should not expect holiday courses in pilates, yoga, water aerobics or kick-boxing. Instead, the importance of the great outdoors in Trentino means that any health cure or relaxation package generally features an element of exercise in the lakes and mountains, whether summer swimming or water-sports, strolling with a guide on a botanical trail, or following a snow-shoes excursion around a lovely stretch of forest. This way, visitors can benefit from the full range of facilities in the hotel or fitness centre but combine a relaxing holiday with a stimulating sports or outdoor exercise programme.

Partly thanks to Trentino's fame as a winter playground, the local hotels are well-provided with the saunas and steam rooms that skiers increasingly expect. Fortunately, the same excellent facilities are also on offer to summer visitors, and tend to be available even in relatively small 3-star family hotels. However, the “spa culture” philosophy runs deep so visitors from the UK or the United States are generally amazed at the range of medical conditions that thermal treatments claim to treat. As in the rest of Italy, there is considerable faith in such spa treatments both from a medical and health perspective.

Trentino spas are at the forefront of Italian health and fitness programmes, but are increasingly realising that many foreign visitors, including those from the UK, prefer a wide range of activities and treatments. This broader approach is also linked to the fact that a crisis in the spa sector was triggered by the State's decision to stop funding health stays in spa resorts. As a result both of market forces and a shifting clientele, many such centres are now promoting wide-ranging health, fitness and beauty programmes as well as the classic, medically-based spa treatments still expected by the Italians and Germans.

### **Choosing a Spa or Health & Fitness Centre**

It is important to choose a health and fitness centre carefully since the range covers everything from spa resorts famous for specific treatments for existing medical conditions to health and leisure centres with light beauty treatments on offer. If the medical side of spas is important to you, then select a spa with care, checking its relevance to your condition, and the availability of an English-speaking doctor. Also come equipped with a letter outlining your medical condition. Most spas, given the unique properties of the water, specialise in different disciplines and medical conditions. The established spas always have doctors on hand and link conventional medicine to water cures, including mud packs, mud baths and inhalations. In the middle, are a range of spas that treat specific conditions yet, at the same time, can cater for the health-minded visitor who simply wants to feel invigorated or pampered.

If the medical side seems intimidating, bear in mind that many spas offer a wide range of general water cures, but with the emphasis on a healthy holiday. Levico Terme, one of the best-known spa resorts in Trentino, is not alone in providing a broader range of options to complement its traditional spa-based treatments. For instance, a typical "relaxation package" includes a medical examination, "anti-stress" spa baths and health or beauty treatments. Depending on the season, check the ► **Summer Holiday Offers** or ► **Winter Holiday Offers** brochures produced by APT Trentino for the general public. These list the latest packages, including health and fitness holidays in different resorts.

Another novelty is "Well-being holidays" in such areas as Val di Fassa, with healthy holidays on offer in the alpine resorts of Canazei, Campitello or Passo Pordoi. In selected hotels, guests are entitled to use of the swimming pool, exercise classes and massage. The outdoor Trentino twist is that these packages also include cable-car tickets, excursions with alpine guides, and some rustic meals in picturesque mountain inns (*rifugi*). Resorts in the Valle del Primiero area also offer appealing "Beauty Weeks" or "Relaxation Weekends", which include sessions in the pool, whirlpool, sauna, steam-baths and so on.

### **Hay Baths – better than a roll in the hay (or so they say in Trentino!)**

Hay baths are a curious treatment that can be enjoyed by any visitor with an hour to spare – although Italians tend to follow a course of several sessions. This is a popular therapeutic treatment in the region, involving lying down under a huge heap of newly-mown hay and sweating your cares away. Hotels near the meadows of Trento's Monte Bondone, with its slopes carpeted in health-giving herbs and grasses, are the ideal place for such hay baths. In neighbouring Garniga Terme, for instance, hay baths are believed

to relieve such conditions as osteoporosis, rheumatism, and general stiffness in the joints. At the very least, the treatment promises to leave you feeling sleepy and relaxed. A number of Trentino hotels are equipped for hay baths and provide essential advice on contra-indications. (Hay baths are not recommended for those who suffer from heart problems). Well beyond Trento, in such resorts as Cavalese, it is possible to find hay baths, which are paid for by the session. ► *For more information on hay baths request the Trentino **Spas and Springs** brochure or consult the Trento tourist office.*

## **Spas & Beneficial Springs**

Trentino's watering holes have drawn such luminaries as Sigmund Freud, Thomas Mann, and Franz Kafka. Many of the spas were thriving centres in the Middle Ages, while others came to prominence at the tail end of the Austro-Hungarian empire, when the Austrian nobility sought cures in these dignified alpine resorts. Today, as well as the medical benefits, there is much emphasis on the restorative powers of the waters, and the peace of mind produced by a stay in these lovely lakes and mountains.

Trentino waters are rich in minerals such as calcium and magnesium, and also have a high concentration of iron and arsenic salts. "Taking the waters" is still a respected Italian tradition, with water cures a legitimate medical therapy. Depending on the spa, the properties of the water and local medical specialisation, the spas are suitable for treating such conditions as allergies, skin complaints, rheumatism, gynaecological problems and myriad other disorders. Water aficionados (including most Italians) distinguish between the qualities of "light" and "heavy" waters, with each having different benefits.

Even if staying in a spa resort, there is no obligation to take the treatments. Visitors who wish to avoid the medical implications of the spas may prefer to stay in a hotel or villa outside the spa complex, but can visit the spas if wished. Special deals are available at a number of spas so visitors should enquire locally before booking. *(Also request the ► **Summer Holiday Offers** brochure produced by Apt Trentino for the general public).*

**Levico Terme** and neighbouring Vetriolo Terme are both noted spa resorts, with waters descending from a great height through galleries dug in the Middle Ages to facilitate the extraction of minerals. The appeal of Levico is also linked to its dignified 19<sup>th</sup>-century air, reflected in the grand *Art Nouveau* villas, many of which have been turned into hotels. The finest formal villa hotels offer an echo of the grandeur of life under Austrian times, when the Hapsburg empire stretched as far as Trentino. The top hotels boast formidably-equipped fitness centres offering state-of-the-art technology, treatments linked to water cures, and gyms, tennis courts and spacious grounds.

**Vetriolo Terme**, close by, claims to be the highest spa in Europe (at 1,500 metres). The newly-refurbished spa is famous for its iron and arsenic-laced waters, supposedly great for gynaecological or skin complaints. Both Vetriolo and Levico offer a complete range of thermal treatments from mud baths to taking the waters, with physiotherapy and therapeutic massages also available. Despite the high concentration of iron and arsenic

salts in the water, the quantities are still relatively small enough to present few risks – nor are the spas over-run with legendary arsenic poisoners!

**Rabbi Terme** is a spa set at the entrance to the Stelvio, the largest national park in Italy. The spa's fizzy waters are considered suitable for weight loss, hypertension, and respiratory problems. **Pejo Terme** (or Peio), is also set in the Stelvio park, making both spas good bases for walking holidays through woods and alpine pastures. Pejo's "light" water is popular for cures and recommended for rheumatism, digestive and urinary problems, as well as for anemia, obesity and general weight loss. Local hotels often have a fitness centre, solarium, sauna, gym, beauty centre, not to mention a disco as an alternative way of getting into shape. **Comano Terme** is noted for its pure water bubbling up from the depths of the Brenta Dolomites. The spa's mineral-bearing waters are suitable for treating skin complaints and respiratory disorders. Neighbouring hotels, including a romantic villa-hotel, have links with the spa as well as tennis courts, bowls (*bocce*), a sauna, solarium and beauty farm. ► *For more information on spas request the Trentino Spas and Springs brochure.*

### **Health & Fitness Centres: Spa, Lake or Mountains?**

Since the region abounds in health and fitness centres it is invidious to single out particular ones. Some centres are linked to spa resorts while others enjoy a lakeside location or are set in and around in the best-known winter ski resorts. When choosing a health and fitness centre, visitors can opt for one that also offers medically-approved treatments (for instance, at a spa resort). An alternative is to choose a lovely lakeside setting that is both a traditional holiday resort and a place that just happens to have a noted health centre. The lakeside resorts on Lake Garda, Lake Lavarone and Lake Levico would come into this category, for instance. Even so, there are variations since Lake Levico doubles as a spa resort (*see above*) while Lake Lavarone comes with worthy psycho-analytical baggage as a holiday spot favoured by Sigmund Freud, a past visitor. ► *Request the Storyline: Twenty Five Things you Didn't Know about Trentino.*

**Lake Garda:** Thanks to its mild climate, Lake Garda has long been advocated as a place for convalescence and recuperation, and has a history of attracting German and Austrian visitors. However, in recent years, the British have made great inroads here and this remains one of the most popular centres for holiday-makers from the UK. The restorative, balmy micro-climate also makes Garda a healthy option for elderly or frail visitors, who can choose restful lake-side holidays in such resorts as Riva del Garda and Arco. However, visitors of all ages appreciate the climate, with hardier holiday-makers drawn to the rugged outdoor pursuits on or around the lake, from wind-surfing to rock-climbing. ► *For more information on the area, request Trentino's range of Lake Garda brochures, dedicated to castles, sports, walking, mountain-biking or accommodation.*

In the case of the better-known lakes, water-sports also provide a healthy option, not forgetting walking and mountain-bike trails around the lakes. In keeping with the

Trentino ethos, visitors, even those staying in luxurious hotels or well-equipped spas, are encouraged to make use of the outdoor activities on offer. In the case of Lake Garda, the appealing Trentino resorts have the added appeal of a Mediterranean climate. In Riva del Garda, a wide range of local hotels offer such facilities as games rooms, swimming pools and tennis courts. Upmarket hotels may be equipped with a gym, tennis courts, pool and beauty centre. ► *Request the **Lakes** brochure as well as brochures on individual lakes.*

**Mountain resorts:** Trentino's winter ski resorts also abound in health and fitness centres, with noted centres in the Val di Fassa and Val di Fiemme valleys, as well as in famous resorts such as Madonna di Campiglio. As far as ski resorts are concerned, many 3- and 4-star hotels offer sauna, steam room and solarium, while larger resorts such as Madonna di Campiglio often have small gyms or beauty centres as well. Canazei, the capital of the rural Val di Fassa area, is mentioned purely as an example of the range on offer in Trentino, winter or summer. In the area is a luxurious, purpose-built health and fitness centre, offering a sense of luxury and well-being, as well as 3 and 4 star hotels equipped with sauna, solarium, gym, as well as beauty farm, sauna and jacuzzi facilities. ► *To check facilities, request the complete Trentino **Accommodation list, Residence list**, or request the relevant hotel brochure produced by each area. Alternatively, if you have a hotel in mind, check it out on the **Trentino website**: [www.Trentino.to](http://www.Trentino.to).*

*Note: Naturally, the Trentino Tourist Board must remain impartial and hence cannot recommend specific hotels or health and fitness centres. However, journalists interested in covering this theme should contact the Trentino Information Service in London for full accommodation and spa lists, as well as guidance in matching the journalist to the products and destinations most appropriate for the story and publication in question.*