

Storylines

Winter Fun Beyond the Ski Slopes

Day in the Dolomites. Clear head, crisp skies. Typical frenetic British skiers, carving sweeping arcs on the powdery surface. No time to watch sleek Italians sunning themselves on the terrace, smug about living in snow heaven. But how do they eat four courses and still ski downhill in style?

For non-skiers or visitors who want some wintry variety, there is plenty to do off the pistes. Let others race for the ski-lifts or seek out the thrills of serpentine slides through narrow forest trails. Focus instead on the sheer loveliness of the Dolomites off the skiing circuit. Snow-boarding, ice-skating, tobogganing, bob-sleighbing, horse-riding and dog-sledding are just a few of the sporty alternatives. Try galloping through pine forests. Or paragliding over the glittering peaks. Sunbathing on an alpine terrace. Window-shopping in a chic resort. Or even eating for Italy in the alpine inns. (Rifugio Stoppani, an inn above Madonna di Campiglio, serves roast leg of wild boar at over 2000 metres).

Night in the Dolomites. Snow-shoeing under the stars. Silence. Spotting a long-eared owl. No sign of a brown bear, but they're in the woods somewhere. Bears aside, you're spoilt for choice. Sipping mulled wine by a blazing bonfire. Traipsing through the snow roped to a Siberian husky. Crunching through the woods in a horse-drawn sleigh. The rumble of snowcats as they prepare the pistes for tomorrow. A smooth torch-lit descent to dinner in a converted mill. Deciding between the mushroom risotto and the mixed grill, the trout and the tasty "strangled priests," a local speciality. Back at the village, *apres-ski* beckons in the local bars, complete with accordion music and tall tales of chamois spotted, crazy slopes skied, and bumbling bears circumvented. Tobogganing downhill after one too many *grappas*. Drunk on the Dolomites. Planning a soothing hay bath back at the hotel. Massages are so *passe*.

Trentino Winter Factfile:

Alpine Cuisine: Trentino prides itself on its hearty, warming winter dishes. Expect feasts of salami, game, dumplings, stew and *spumante* in a rustic alpine refuge, or pizza back at the resort. But the inns are all so cosy and quaint that you want to move in immediately, even before the *vino* and the panoramic views have befuddled the brain. (► *See Inns below; also request A Taste of Trentino Storyline from Trentino's London office*).

Christmas markets: These festive occasions are a reminder of Trentino's Austrian and Tyrolean heritage. The Christmas markets evoke a cosy, traditional, feel-good mood in keeping with comparable markets in German cities. However, the Italian heritage ensures that the markets are less kitsch; moreover, many of the gastronomic delicacies on display are distinctly Italian, from Trentino gastronomic delicacies to mulled wine and winter dishes rustled up before your eyes. Typical products include Italian (even Trentino-made) hand-crafts, particularly wooden sculptures, picture frames or kitchen utensils; hand-

made Christmas decorations (including carved cribs and figurines); hand-made jewellery and candles, as well as distinctive chinaware and glassware. A typical Christmas market is held in Trento (► *Request the **Trento Fact File Storyline***). Other traditional Christmas markets take place in San Martino di Castrozza and in the Valsugana.

Dog-sledding & dog-trekking: Dog sledding has a primeval appeal, with even non-dog-lovers intrigued by the relationships within the pack of huskies, and by their response to the musher. The sledge, pulled by a trained team, sweeps into the woods, marking the start of an exhilarating excursion. One of the most rewarding places to take part in dog-sledding is the Italian Dog-Sledding School at Passo Tonale, run by the Armenian Khatchikian brothers. Such is their expertise that the brothers have even been called in to help train huskies to take part in major action films, such as *Cliffhanger*. There are sometimes “Musher for a Day” courses in which visitors can experience the sensation of being a pack leader. Dog-trekking, which is less common, allows for even closer contact with the dogs. In guided groups, visitors are individually harnessed to a husky, trained to respond to the temporary master - especially by towing you up tiring uphill slopes!

Extreme sports: Whether you fancy yourself as an extreme sports champion or simply as a daring enthusiast, Trentino is the perfect terrain for adventurous new challenges. The options include: ski jumping from one of two Olympic ski-jumping centres; climbing frozen waterfalls solidified into turquoise ice sculptures; ski orienteering; ski mountaineering, which pits man against the elements, with daredevil descents of sheer walls of ice; or charting a wilderness of open crevasses, narrow chutes and giddy towers.

Festivals & Folklore: Christmas is heralded by Christmas markets (*see above*) which help to raise the spirits in mid-winter, with New Year’s Eve celebrated in some valleys with fireworks and a huge bonfire. The Carnival season, from January to March, combines folklore, ritual and heartfelt tradition in explosive pageantry dressed up in pagan masks and exotic costumes. The festivals take place in valleys throughout the region with, for instance, devilish Tyrolean figures paraded in Caldonazzo or the Campitello carnival, which celebrates the curious Ladin culture. The more pagan carnivals present a clear contrast with the patrician carnivals and balls in Arco and Madonna di Campiglio, a legacy of Hapsburg rule. During the carnival season, festive food is washed down with mulled wine. ► (*Consult the Trentino Information Service in London - or see the festivals and festive recipes listed on the Trentino website: www.trentino.to*). Also ask for our booklets on **Trentino Legends**).

Horse-riding: This is a tempting option in both summer and winter, and covers the range from horse-trekking to a ride in a horse-drawn sleigh, usually pulled by Romanian horses comfortable with the snow. One romantic option is to take a torchlit ride through the Adamello Brenta park, or to go pony-trekking in the unspoilt Lagorai area. In Pinzolo, near Madonna di Campiglio, the riding school runs trips to inns in the Brenta Dolomites. The less energetic can opt for a horse-drawn sleigh around Pellizzano in the Val di Sole.

Ice-skating: Trentino is a paradise for sports on ice. Apart from ice-skating, the region is the place for curling (think bowls on ice), ice hockey and broomball (a variant on ice

hockey). There are ice rinks in Andalo, Canazei, Cavalese, Pinzolo, Folgarida, Baselga di Pine and Trento. However, expert climbers of glaciers associate the region with the Ice Climbing World Cup, a competition staged in Val Daone in western Trentino.

Inns and Lodges (known as “Rifugi,” or refuges): These rustic spots represent a highlight of any holiday in Trentino, as much for their cosy atmosphere and unspoilt location as for their hearty home cooking (*see Alpine Cuisine above*). While many *rifugi* are easily accessible by car or cable-car, others are only reached on skis or on foot. In the case of some alpine lodges, you can be towed back to the piste by snowcat –from the Cascina Zeledra lodge near Madonna di Campiglio, for instance. Alternatively, you can travel to and from certain inns by snowcat or skidoo. Both forms of transport sweep visitors to Rifugio Fuchiade, one of the most atmospheric lodges in the Dolomites, reached from Passo San Pellegrino. Similar inns are known as *malghe*, and are accessible in the same way. One known for its food and atmosphere is Malga Fratezza, reached by skidoo from the Tognola ski area at the foot of the dramatic Pale di San Martino range. ► (*For more information on “rifugi”, request the **Refuges** booklet from the Trentino Information Service in London, or consult the website on www.trentino.to.*)

Italian Alpine Club: Known as the CAI, the Club Alpino Italiano, the Italian Alpine Club is one of the most active in Europe. **Trentino alpine clubs:** Known as the SAT and the SOSAT, these two Trentino alpine sections of the Italian Alpine Club play an important role in the sporting life of the region. The clubs, which number close to 25,000 members, are responsible for mapping and maintenance of mountain paths, as well as for maintaining and running the “*rifugi*”, the alpine refuges, inns and hostels that are a familiar sight in Trentino (*see Inns above*). The club also plays an educational role in providing climbing and mountaineering courses, as well as encouraging both locals and visitors to respect the environment.

Resorts: Most winter outdoor pursuits, activities and fun are focused on the main winter resorts (► *Request the **Winter Wonderland Storyline** for a list of resorts; also ask for the **Trentino Winter Traditions** brochure from our London office*).

Snow-shoeing: For skiers and non-skiers alike, snow-shoeing can be a delightful way of appreciating the scenery in a more relaxed way than skiing allows. Romantics may choose an evening excursion, either by torchlight or under a full moon. The trails, always led by experts, often involve sightings of the local wildlife in the regional parks, particularly eagles, chamois and deer. The best-known snow-shoeing event is the *Ciaspolada*, the January mini marathon staged in Fondo, in the Alta Val di Non. Over 5,000 enthusiasts take part in this race across the valley. ► (*Consult the Trentino Information Service in London for details of local snow-shoeing excursions or events*).

Sunbathing: On lazy, sunny winter’s days, consider heading to a rustic inn for lunch and a snooze; even (heretical thought) giving the skiing a miss. In Trentino, numerous cable-cars can lead to you up to an alpine inn, with no ski boots needed. For perfect posing, Groste, the highest ski area of Madonna di Campiglio, is a fashionable choice. From the terrace by the inn, you can check out the latest fashions in skiwear before dozing off. If

you find yourself in Canazei, in the Val di Fassa, then opt for Pecol, set above the resort, for a gentle snooze in the sun. Alternatively, in Folgaria, another part of Trentino, consider a hearty lunch in the Rifugio Stella d'Italia before sunbathing on the terrace.

Tobogganning: This fun pursuit is aimed at children and the young at heart (including reckless diners leaving an alpine refuge for the valley floor after a grappa too many). At the other end of the scale, children's tobogganing is catered for by means of special sledge lifts and areas set aside for tobogganning. Resorts with sledge lifts include Lavarone, Costa di Folgaria and Passo Tonale; there are sledge races in the Levico area.

Trentino alpine guides: The region boasts over 170 qualified alpine guides, who are linked to the main Trentino alpine clubs see above. The guides' prime function is to lead individuals and groups of all ages in mountain pursuits and to run courses on everything from mountain safety to snow-shoeing, or from rock climbing to ski mountaineering.

Views: Given the stupendous nature of the Dolomites, scenic views unfold from ski slopes throughout the region. However, many of these vistas are equally accessible to non-skiers or to those taking a day off from the slopes. It is invidious to select particular spots but the Sass Pordoi peak should be on most wish lists. Passo Pordoi (situated at 2950 metres) is a spectacular mountain pass between Canazei in Trentino and Arabba in the Veneto. From the pass, the cable car goes up to the Sass Pordoi peak, allowing for panoramic views over Passo Pordoi and the Trentino Dolomites, with a clear view of the peaks in Austria and Switzerland. Another great view is to be had from the cable car at the top of San Martino di Castrozza: all around are the majestic Pale di San Martino mountains that so impressed the early British mountaineers (► *see Storyline on **The British Mountaineering Tradition in Trentino***). For visitors who find themselves in Andalo, then the cable car to the top reveals views of the impressive Brenta range. Alternatively, in Madonna di Campiglio, the Groste slopes and adjoining inn, reached by cable car, enjoy different views over the Brenta Dolomites (*see Sunbathing, above*).

Walks by starlight: This is a relaxing approach to appreciating both scenery and the alpine inns. A walk to an ice waterfall or a small hamlet could end with mulled wine by a bonfire or conclude in an alpine inn. Depending on the excursion, the return can be on snow-shoes, skis, snowboard or toboggan - or even by skidoo or snowcat.

Window-Shopping: Shopping may not be high on most skiers' agendas but it provides a welcome rest from the slopes, particularly since a visit can be slotted in before dinner, in the early evening. (Afternoon opening hours in the resorts are: 4.30pm-8pm). Many resorts will sell stylish sunglasses, ski-wear and sports equipment, as well as local gastronomic delicacies, from excellent regional wines and grappa to local salami and cheeses (► *see **A Taste of Trentino** Storyline*). The bigger or more fashionable resorts will also have chic boutiques selling designer goods, although Trento, the provincial capital, will naturally have the widest range of shopping outlets. As far as ski resorts are concerned, shopping in Canazei, Madonna di Campiglio and Pinzolo can be a rewarding experience. If in the region at the right time, visitors should take every opportunity to visit a typical Trentino Christmas market (*see entry above*).