

Golden delicious

If an apple a day keeps the doctor away, a touring trip to Italy's Brenta region could be the perfect prescription

Hopefully soon, armed with immunisation passes or recent test results, continental touring will be back on the agenda and when it is, Italy beckons. The roads, the views, the food, as well as a national appreciation of the motorcycle, there's something ever so special about visiting Italy on two wheels. And, of all the splendour the country has to offer, the Brenta mountain range has to be one of the best regions for riders. Situated in the north east of the country within the province of Trentino, the Brenta is designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and makes for sublime touring – as well as fruitful surprises. Last September we took a tour of the Cima Tosa (the second highest peak of the Brenta range) and stayed at the off-season ski resort of Madonna Di Campiglio. At 1500 metres above sea level, it makes for a great base with spectacular views of the mountains to the east.

Hairpins and ham
Early morning and the sun has just risen above the mountains, the jagged peaks back lit against receding layers of morning haze and the roadside grasses encrusted with galaxies of twinkling dewdrops. We stand on our pegs as we bump down the narrow lane from our apartment before heading south on the SS239 (Viale Dolomiti di Brenta). We soon pass an ornate circular stone emblem marking the end of the town and descend through a series of hairpins and forested sections until we reach our planned turn onto the SP53. On our way, we notice numerous signs advertising speck, either to eat in restaurants or to buy by the kilo. Italian speck is a type of prosciutto to which is basically a dry cured, lightly smoked ham, and a note is made to experience it later. The sun climbs in the sky as we



Azure waters put you in mind of the best of the Mediterranean

'The area is designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site'

descend the valley, causing our shadows to repeatedly rotate around the bikes as we navigate the hair pins. As the road levels out, we turn left to cross a bridge over the Sarca river (famous for fly fishing) before entering the pretty town of Pinzolo. A few miles of slow urban riding follow before we leave the SS239 via a left turn onto the Via Chiesa Nuova, a road I'd discovered whilst scanning the maps the previous evening. We climb gently away from the main road and pass through the delightful narrow cobbled streets of Bocenago. The old town centre feels like a place forgotten by time; aging wooden shutters set into decaying stone-built walls with arched doorways and barred lower window apertures. An old man leaning on a stick watching

us pass with no change in expression completes the scene. After passing through the villages of Fisto and Ches we climb away left on the SP53 and higher into the forest. The road is narrow, cracked, damp and strewn with leaves. In places it is quite dark as the trees have grown over and almost turned the road into a tunnel. A low wall to the left of the road is coated with lichen and moss. The surface itself is green in many sections as we become enveloped in an eerie, emerald world. **A taste of paradise**
The higher we get the more the trees start to thin out, letting flashes of sun light penetrate the dense cover, strobe-lighting the road. Suddenly *Continued over*

'We burst out into a grassy clearing bathed in sunlight'



Summer is here, the snow has gone and it's time for bikes to replace skiers



Towns and villages have a traditional feel



The local speck ham is a delicacy

You might think these are vineyards but they're orchards



'Fully ripe yellow and red apples festoon every row'

we burst out into a veritable Shangri-la – a grassy clearing bathed in warm sunlight slopes up to our left and the forest to our right is carpeted with fungus. We decide to stop and let it all soak in.

Leaving that small taste of paradise at the top, the ride down the other side is of a completely different character. The surface is relatively new, the scenery more open and there are numerous roadside houses as we descend towards the valley floor. A pair of steep hairpins brings us through the village of Montagne and yet more technical riding.

A beautiful series of 10 switchbacks delivers us down through the forest to Preore, where we turn left onto the SP34, once again avoiding the main road route. A very pleasant ride with sweeping bends takes us through the villages of Ragoli, Coltura, Stenico and the very picturesque Sclemo before joining the SS421 towards the beautiful Lake Molveno and a stop for lunch. We pull into The Lago Park Hotel and enjoy an excellent lunch of fish with orange slices and spinach gnocchi on the lakeside terrace. This lake is always included in a list of the prettiest lakes in Italy. Sunbeds and umbrellas on the stony beach beneath the terrace combine with the amazing aquamarine blue of the water lend a feel of being somewhere in the Mediterranean.

Granny Smith came too

Back on the bikes, we climb out of Molveno on the SS421 and for the next 15km enjoy a great ride on sweeping bends through lightly autumn-kissed forested sections, a sign of the season soon to come. The woodland sections are punctuated by rolling grassy hills and small beautifully kept towns. Roads are good and traffic is light – most overtakes involve tractors.

Between Cavedago and Spormaggiore we pass the imposing ruins of Belfort castle to our left. Although looking like a relatively recent construction

it was actually built in 1311 to protect the districts of Andalo and Molveno, but subsequent fires and rebuilding have removed many of its medieval features. A little further on, as we approach Spormaggiore, the countryside to our left opens up into a wide valley with plantations stretching far into the distance. They are set in regular arrays that at first glance look like huge vineyards but closer to the road they are revealed as rows of heavily laden fruit trees.

Welcome to apple land! The Trentino is one of the most important production regions of high-quality apples in Europe. The main varieties of apples cultivated here include Granny Smith, Golden Delicious, Stark Delicious, Braeburn, Royal Gala, and Fuji, and most are produced organically.

Fully ripe yellow and red apples festoon the plantation rows on either side of the road and as far as you can see. Large green plastic collection crates litter the verge in preparation for the coming harvest. We turn left on the old SP55 in the direction of 'Lover' (presumably, anyone who lives here must be an apple lover as there is precious little else) – a beautiful winding road through manicured orchards and rolling hills. It's a bit like being an insect making your way through a bristled hairbrush, and we are having so much fun we take a random tour around the area and get lost amid the scrumptious apple-dominated scenery.

Right round the mountain

Back on the route, we continue to follow an apple trail through Flavon and Tuorno then rejoin the main road at Cles to head north on the SS43, where the scenery changes once again. The orchards drop steeply away in terraces to Lake Santa Giustina below us to the right. Once we pass the lake the apples give way to forest on both sides of the sweeping curves of the road. We soon cross a bridge over the river Noce and turn left on the SS42 towards Madonna

Di Campiglio and the home run begins. We have come right around the Cima Tosa and are heading south west back down the valley with the mountains now to our left.

With the sun dropping ever lower, the light is getting warmer and heating up the smooth tarmac beneath us. This fast, sweeping road is a joy to ride in these conditions. We slow to 50kph for the villages along the way, but the sections in between are clearly something to be enjoyed, judging by the pace of the local sportsbike riders as they fly by in both directions. With everything now bathed in warm light and a restaurant reservation for that evening, a spirited ride back to base brings a glorious end to a golden, delicious touring day. **MCH**

150km ROUTE

- Madonna di Campiglio
- Pinzolo ● Strembo
- Montagne ● Preopre ● Stenico ● Sclemo ● Lake Molveno
- Spormaggiore ● Denno
- Cles ● Terzolas ● Dimar
- Campo Carlo Magno
- Madonna di Campiglio



Fresh from the tree, both golden and delicious



Even the roadside shops are very special

'We are having so much fun we take a random tour'



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TIME TO PLAN A TRIP



Prepare for some incredible riding experiences

Plan your trip into the Brenta Range

Best time to visit

The Trentino region of Italy has stunning mountain roads and breath-taking scenery. Due to the altitude on some of the roads, the best months to ride are between June and October. It is advisable to check whether particular roads are open or not.

Speed limits

Urban areas 50kmh (31mph); minor out-of-town roads 90kmh (56mph); major out-of-town roads 110kmh (68mph); motorways 130km/h (81mph). There are many speed cameras in all the villages so always be mindful of your throttle.

The best roads

SS239 Between Dimaro and Pinzolo – highest point on this road is Passo Campo Carlo Magno with 1682m. The pass connects Val Rendena and Val di Sole. To the west are the Adamello Presanella mountains and to the east are the Brenta Dolomites.

SP63 Shortcut through a winding forest road between Strembo and Preore. Not for the faint-hearted – it's very narrow with lots of hairpins.

SP34 Towards Solemo and then SS421 towards Lake Molveno. Lago di Molveno is definitely worth a stop as it's nestled at the foot of the Brenta Dolomites.

SP73 Between Denno and Cles

is apple land. The road winds through orchards and quaint villages.

The all-important food...

The cuisine here is a mixture of Austrian Alpine and Italian. On the one hand you have speck (a smoked prosciutto), knödel (dumplings which can be savoury or sweet) and strudel (especially apple strudel). On the other, there are typical Italian dishes of pasta and polenta. In the Trentino region speck is one of the most popular products and can be eaten and bought in nearly every village. There is a very particular process in producing these hams. First they are coated with a mixture of salt and spices according to secret recipes. After the seasoning, the process of lightly smoking the speck, which takes place with slightly resinous beechwood, begins. After smoking the hams have to age (up to 22 weeks). This results in an excellent quality of produce which you just have to sample.

Further information

Madonna di Campiglio is two easy days' ride from the UK at 750 miles from Calais. Nearest airports are Bolzano, Verona, Bergamo or Milano. Motorcycle hire is available various places throughout the region – check out Trentino's motorcycling resource website to find more local information, at: www.trentinoinmoto.it

The sort of riding we've dreamed of during lockdown