**A RARE MIX OF MOUNTAINS, LAKES AND CULTURE**

**Trentino’s cutting-edge museums and sculpture parks are testament to its vigorous cultural life. When it comes to art, science and history, this mountain province punches well above its weight.**

Trentino sits on one of the principal trade routes between Italy and northern Europe – along the Adige valley, and over the Brenner pass. For centuries, it’s been a highway for ideas as well as goods, and it’s nourished our long traditions of artistic and intellectual endeavour. Under the Prince-Bishops of Trento, the region developed into important religious and cultural centre, and was later one of the cradles of the Futurist movement in modern art. More recently, our university has become one of the most highly-rated in Italy.

You’ll see the same rigour and ambition in our museums and galleries – which include an cutting-edge science museum, and one of the country’s most important collections of 20th century Italian art. Together, they offer a cultural depth you don’t often find in the Alps – and a very different kind of lakes-and-mountains holiday experience.

Each of the institutions featured here is free to enter with the Trentino Guest Card (www.visittrentino.info/trentinoguestcard).

**MUSE: a science museum designed by Renzo Piano**

Set on the outskirts of Trento, and designed by Renzo Piano (architect of London’s Shard), MUSE is as much a piece of contemporary sculpture as a state-of-the-art science museum. Outside, slanting walls of glass echo the natural architecture of the Alps, and seem to float on pools of water. Inside, the spacious high-tech galleries are flooded with natural light.

The exhibits are no less impressive. MUSE’s principal theme is the impact of altitude on ecology, from mountain peaks and glaciers, all the way down to the rainforests. Highlights include the greenhouse – where waterfalls run through a living recreation of a Ugandan rainforest – and a giant video of weather systems during the 2004 Hurricane Season in the Altantic. There’s even a hands-on “Maxi Ooh!” zone for 0-5 year olds.

This is not just a museum. MUSE is renowned for its scientific research, while on the first floor you’ll find its Fablab. Here, visitors can design their own objects, or download designs from America and China, and make them real with a 3D printer.

**MART: one of Italy’s most important collections of modern art**

MART is our must-see art gallery – an important collection of modern and contemporary art, which is particularly strong on the Futurists, but also includes masterpieces by de Chirico and Morandi. The emphasis is overwhelmingly on Italian painters and sculptors, and offers the visitor a breathtaking introduction to the country’s artistic output over the last 120 years. But there are works by the international A-list too – including Picasso, Klee, Kandinsky and Joseph Beuys.

The building itself is a treat. Crouched behind two 18th century *palazzi* in the middle of Rovereto, it gives little of its grandeur away at first sight: but then opens out under a vast, steel and plexiglass dome, around which its galleries are arranged.

**Powerhouse of the Prince Bishops: the Castello del Buonconsiglio**

Its single most celebrated artwork is the Cycle of the Months: a vivid depiction of life in 15th century Trentino, painted by an unknown Gothic master from Bohemia. But really, it’s the overall impression created by the Castello del Buonconsiglio that will stay with you. The seat of the Prince-Bishops of Trento, it dominates the city’s historic core, and is a striking testament to their self-confidence and power – especially during their 16th century heyday.

There are four distinct areas of development – the original 13th century Castelvecchio, a 14th century Venetian-Gothic loggia, the Renaissance Magno Palazzo, and the Baroque Giunta Albertiana. Together they offer a fascinating potted history of Italian architecture, and house an extraordinary collection of art and archaeology, stretching from prehistory all the way to the late 19th century.

**Italy’s best ethnographic museum**

Of course, there’s a lot more to culture than paintings and sculpture, as you’ll see at the Museum of the Customs and Traditions of the People of Trentino. Set inside a 13th century monastery at San Michele all’Adige, it offers a beautifully-curated collection of tools, toys, furniture and musical instruments, displayed in 43 rooms. There are over 12,000 exhibits in all – evoking sights, smells and practices which were utterly familiar to our forbears, but which have now disappeared completely. No wonder it’s regarded as the best collection of its kind

**Where art and landscape combine: Trentino’s sculpture parks**

One of the most striking aspects of our cultural scene is the way that some of our most cutting-edge events and institutions have moved out of our towns and cities, and into the mountains. Our open-air music festival, the Sounds of the Dolomites is a striking example of this (www.isuonidelledolomiti.it). So too are our outdoor sculpture parks.

The finest work can be found at Arte Sella in the Val di Sella – a stone’s throw from the lakes of Levico and Caldonazzo. Here, the sculptures and installations are all site-specific, and are as rooted in the landscape as the trees around them. But there are exciting developments afoot in the Val di Fiemme’s RespirArt project as well. Here, the theme is the relationship not just between art and nature, but art and time. The guiding principle is one of “letting masterpieces go”, and each work has been made with its own slow disintegration in mind.

**A concrete crust of mighty forts**

For centuries, Trentino was on the front line – between Italy and the Alps, and between northern and southern Europe. But its status was never more uncertain than in the years of rivalry between the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the newly-unified Kingdom of Italy, which culminated in the fighting of the Great War.

For anyone with a head for history, the remains of this tense and dramatic period are surprising and enthralling in equal measure. Whether you’re overlooking Lake Garda or standing on the summit of Monte Pasubio, the **battlefields of 1915-18** are extraordinary places. Clinging to cliff tops, and cut through solid rock, they are testament to the murderous ingenuity of man, and his almost boundless resilience. Meanwhile the **network of forts,** built by the Austro-Hungarian Empire to protect its territory, hint at the vast wealth and energy the rivalry consumed. They are also dazzling feats of engineering.

There are 80-odd forts in total in Trentino. Nearly all are sunk deep into the earth, and you’ll barely notice them at first. But an increasing number are being restored and opened to the public – the latest, in 2016, was the Tagliata Superiore di Civezzano, part of the Austrian defences around Trentino.

The most poignant are those that saw action in the Great War. You can explore them by following short sections of the 520km footpath, the Sentiero della Pace, or the 100km dei Forti bike trail: and with 19 museums in Trentino dedicated to the conflict, you’re never far from a source of exhaustively-researched information.

For further art & culture info: [www.visittrentino.info/culture](http://www.visittrentino.info/culture)

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