

Press Release

Merano and Environs

Exercise in Nature

Merano and Environs in South Tyrol/Südtirol is characterized by its close proximity to both the city and the mountains. The Merano basin lies at the foot of the Texelgruppe Nature Park, with mountains of over 3,000 meters in height, offering protection against cold winds from the north and forming a natural border with Austria. It is renowned for its mild climate and Alpine-Mediterranean vegetation. In contrast to the nearby three thousand meter-high mountains, the small town of Merano/Meran lies at an elevation of only 300 meters and is cosmopolitan and Mediterranean in atmosphere. The geographical proximity of the high Alpine mountain landscape to this small Mediterranean-style town provides a range of attractions in all seasons.

South Tyrol is the most northern region in Italy, and a scenic transition from north to south. Here, the Alpine landscapes meet lush Mediterranean vegetation. Perhaps more than anything else, the spa town of Merano is characterized by the Mediterranean vegetation that flourishes in its mild climate. Palm trees, lemon trees and cacti all line the promenades of the city, while the snowy peaks in the background remind visitors that they are still in the Alps.

Gardens and Walking Trails

Merano is known as a garden town. It is not for nothing that it won the 2015 *Entente Florale Gold Award*, which aims to make towns and cities throughout Europe greener and more livable. Nowhere else outside of South Tyrol are such a variety of plants in bloom. Empress Elisabeth of Austria-Hungary, known familiarly today as Sissi, chose Trauttmansdorff Castle in South Tyrol as her winter residence.

Today, the **Gardens of Trauttmansdorff Castle** are among the most beautiful gardens in the world. In 2013 they received the International *Garden of the Year award*. Over 80 different garden landscapes create a botanical journey through every vegetation zone of the world. Due to Merano's mild climate, plants from all over the world grow on its 12 hectares. In the terraced gardens, fragrant English roses and lilies bloom, while in the sun gardens cacti and olive trees grow. Olive oil is obtained from them – Trauttmansdorff Castle is home to the northernmost-produced olive oil in Italy, even if only in small quantities.

The **city promenades**, which are mostly flat, travel across 12 kilometers through Merano's impressive flora. These summer and winter walks lead along the Passer river, past the most important city landmark, the Kurhaus building, and other notable buildings in typical Art Nouveau style.

The sunny **Tappeinerweg** trail is particularly suited to the local Mediterranean vegetation. In 1893, Franz Tappeiner, a physician and botanist, created this trail for patients of the spa town. With views of the city and the surrounding villages and mountains, the six kilometer-long Tappeinerweg extends from the center of Merano uphill to Tirol/Dorf Tirol, and then continues on to the neighboring village of Lagundo/Algund.

Where the Tappeinerweg trail ends, the **Algunder Waalweg**, a path leading along the ancient irrigation channels of South Tyrol begins, one of eleven waterway trails in Merano. These *Waal* are artificial waterway systems created around the 13th century near Merano, in order to irrigate the fields. Today flat trails known as Waalwege run alongside these ancient waterways. Although they are not usually very high, they nevertheless offer a good view of the surrounding valley. As they are not very steep, they are particularly suitable for leisurely family walks, with some sections also suitable for strollers. The **Meraner Waalrunde** Circuit Trail, which was initiated in 2012 with a unified sign-posting system, combines all of the region's eleven Waalwege trails. It circles the Merano basin and is accessible year-round.

The Merano High Mountain Trail

The **Texelgruppe Nature Park** is located in the Merano region and is the largest nature reserve in South Tyrol. Numerous panoramic paths and hiking trails in the mountainous landscape make this protected area a popular destination for hikers. At over 30,000 hectares, the Texelgruppe Nature Park extends from the Merano basin to the south, the Schnalstal Valley in the west, the Ötztal Alps to the north and the Passeiertal Valley in the east.

Especially popular with hikers is the 24 kilometer **Merano High Mountain Trail** (trail number 24), which over a total distance of about 100 kilometers circles the pristine natural area, with its mixed forests and mountain lakes. It is considered one of the most beautiful trails in the Alps. This multi-day hike between mountain huts in the northwest of South Tyrol offers breathtaking views of the Dolomites, the Rosengarten mountain and the Ortler summit. Mountain guides Robert Schönweger and Helmut Ellmenreich are the founders of this Alpine route, which was opened in 1985. In trips of five to eight days, surefooted climbers hike through Alpine scenery and enjoy authentic South Tyrolean cuisine in the local mountain huts. Each individual stage is also accessible as a single-day hike. Most of the trail is located at an altitude of about 1,500 meters. Cableways connect the Merano High Mountain Trail at several places with starting points in the valley. While the southern part runs through mixed forests and Mediterranean vegetation, the northern part is a high Alpine trail, with barren mountains and difficult passages in some places, which can reach up to 2,900 meters.

Hiking around Merano

Merano and its surrounding areas offer a wide range of walks throughout the year, ranging from 300 to 3,200 meters in height, from promenade walks in Merano to the Texelgruppe Nature Park. Thanks to Merano's **mild climate**, the hiking season starts as early as spring and extends until late autumn.

From Merano, the surrounding hiking areas can be easily reached. Many of the hiking trails start right at your doorstep, while others can be easily reached by cable car or public transport. A climb to the **Spronser Seen** lakes at 2,500 meters, the highest mountain lake district in Europe is highly recommended. The **Hirzer** hiking region is located to the northeast of the city. Further south is the majestic Mount **Ifinger**. The unspoiled Ultental Valley stretches to the southwest with its centuries-old farms and the vast, popular **Schwemmalm** hiking region. Well marked and maintained trails lead to quaint alpine huts in the mountains, where regional dishes are served, such as bacon dumplings, roast lamb and apple strudel made from local and home-grown ingredients.

Travelling by Bike

Cyclists also have a variety of options in Merano and Environs. Due to the **mild climate**, cycling tours around Merano are possible from March until November. Cycling paths run directly from Merano into the nearby valleys as well as recreation areas such as **Merano 2000** and **Vigiljoch** near Lana. Cyclists who prefer not to attempt the high altitude climbs themselves can take advantage of the numerous cable cars around Merano, and simply start their mountain biking tour from the upper cableway station.

The area around Naturno/Naturns is particularly popular for **mountain biking**. Many biking tours start directly from one of the specialized bicycle hotels in the area, which offer dedicated facilities and tailor-made programs as well as healthy cuisine for athletes. Some popular routes include the Naturnser or Tablander Alm mountain pastures, which can also be done by request in the company of a professional instructor from the *Ötzi Bike Academy*.

Road cyclists will appreciate the area around Merano for the picturesque mountain pass roads. These lead up to the Timmelsjoch (2,509 m a.s.l.), Jaufenpass (2,094 m a.s.l.) and Gampenpass (1,512 m a.s.l.) mountain passes.

Those who want to take it easier can stay in the valley and make use of the excellent network of local bicycle paths. The ***Etschradroute cycle path, on the ancient Via Claudia Augusta***, runs for approximately 300 kilometers, from Resia/Reschen in the western part of South Tyrol to Verona. At several railway stations along the route, bicycle rental stations are available, with electric bikes also offered. The **Vinschgauer Bahn** railway also offers a transport service for bikes.

Winter Sports in Merano and Environs

In the region around Merano there are five winter sports areas: **Merano 2000**, which lies in close proximity to the Merano town center, the historic **Schwemmalm in the Ultental Valley**, the small and romantic **Vigiljoch** near Lana, and the idyllic **Pfelders in Passeiertal Valley**. Those looking for a true sporting challenge will find it at the **Schnalstal Glacier in Schnalstal Valley**. The unspoiled natural landscape of the surrounding area can be explored via ski tours, cross-country skiing, tobogganing or snowshoeing.

Ski Areas Close to Town

The **sunny Merano 2000 ski area**, located just five kilometers from the center of Merano, offers around 40 kilometers of slopes, a toboggan run and the Alpine Bob toboggan ride, which is open year-round. With its dedicated Luckis Kinderland children's area and ski kindergarten, Merano 2000 is particularly family friendly. Torchlight descents and night tobogganing, prepared winter hiking trails and authentic South Tyrolean cuisine served at the mountain huts complete the package. The **Therme & Ski combi ticket** combines skiing at Merano 2000 with relaxation in the stylish atmosphere of the Terme Merano, Merano's thermal baths.

Vigiljoch near Lana is a year-round recreational area for locals. While many families spend their summer holidays there, Vigiljoch is also a popular destination for winter hiking in nature, and as a smaller ski area it is ideal for learners and beginners. Vigiljoch is only accessible by cable car, and can be reached from Lana in just seven minutes. Vigiljoch is internationally renowned for the vigilius mountain resort, a five-star hotel designed by celebrity architect Matteo Thun which was designed for sustainability as well as a subtle sense of luxury.

The six-time world luge champion and two-time Olympic medalist **Armin Zöggeler** is originally from Lana.

Ski Areas in the Side Valleys

The **Schwemmalm ski area in the Ultental Valley** has 25 kilometers of slopes, up to 2,625 m high. In addition to short waiting times, it is distinguished by the excellent food served in the traditional peasant mountain huts. The famous downhill skier **Dominik Paris** also comes from the Ultental Valley.

The **Pfelders ski area** is located at the back of the Passeiertal Valley. This small village places a great focus on sustainability, and as such is an Alpine Pearl car-free village. The Dorfexpress village express, a small train on wheels, and a city bus line transport guests from their accommodation to the ski lifts in just a few minutes.

The highest ski area in Merano and Environs, at over 3,200 meters, is located on the **Schnalstal Glacier**. At this height, there are ideal snow conditions as early as the fall, and a certainty of snow well into the spring. Numerous professional athletes such as Marcel Hirscher and Ole Einar Bjordalen come to the Schnalstal Valley to complete their **high altitude training**. A special attraction is the **Ötzi Glacier Tour**. This guided tour takes about eight hours on a roped tour to the discovery site of **Ötzi**, the 5,000 year old glacier mummy. A special attraction at the Schnalstal Glacier is the Schöne Aussicht mountain shelter, which offers a multiple course dumpling tasting menu, a Finnish sauna at almost 3,000 meters and its own line of cosmetics, Glacisse, made from top-quality glacier sand.

From Ice Climbing to Fly Fishing

At the Parcines waterfall, at the Rock Gym in Plan/Pfelders and at the more demanding Hoachwool Via Ferrata at Naturno, amongst other attractions, there are also several **climbing routes** of varying difficulty.

For several years, the ice **climbing World Cup** has been held in Corvara/Rabenstein in Passeiertal Valley. The 25 m high ice tower is accessible not only for professionals, but also for beginners and amateurs. Young **Angelika Rainer** from Merano has already won a world title in ice climbing.

The rivers, streams and mountain lakes around Merano are well-suited for **fishing or fly fishing**. Especially popular is the marbled trout, a fast-growing species of trout which can be found in the Passer, Etsch and Falschauer rivers in the Ultental Valley.

The village of Avelengo/Hafling, about ten kilometers from Merano, is home to the famous **Haflinger horses**. Several stables offer riding lessons and horseback riding. The famous Merano Race Course is located in the Merano district of Maia Bassa/Untermals, and races take place on a regular basis. Annual highlights are the traditional **Haflinger Horse Races** held at Easter and the **Merano Grand Prix**, on the last Sunday in September.

www.merano-suedtirol.it