

Press Release

Merano and Environs

Food and Wine

Cured bacon, apple strudel, whole meal bread and chestnuts. Lemons, coffee, antipasti and pizza – it is not just in the geographic sense that South Tyrol/Südtirol lies between North and South. Here, Alpine custom fuses with Italian cuisine. Like nowhere else, the spa town of Merano/Meran combines a Mediterranean atmosphere with the setting of the Alps. And this is also true of the local cuisine.

Located between North and South, South Tyrol has long been influenced from both sides. The region also benefits from a particularly mild climate due to its unique location on the southern slopes of the Alps. The town of Merano in particular boasts Mediterranean climate year-round, similar to more southern regions. This means that alongside the famous South Tyrolean apples, kiwis and various varieties of grapes also thrive here.

Wine from Merano

Until the mid-20th century, the **Meraner Kurtraube**, a Vernatsch variety, was locally cultivated. Today, the region is known for a wide variety of elegant and unique wines: Gewürztraminer, Sauvignon, Pinot, Lagrein, Cabernet, Merlot and Pinot Noir.

One local South Tyrolean variety and a true curiosity is the **Versoaln** vine at **Katzenzungen Castle** in Prissiano/Prissian. It is over 350 years old, and 300 square meters in size, and each year about 500 bottles of white wine are pressed from its grapes. The vine itself is considered the largest and probably the oldest in the world. Versoaln wine is available only in limited quantities, as the vine is the only one of its kind in existence, and is only served and sold locally within South Tyrol.

The Meran Burggräfler and **Nals Margreid Wineries** are the largest wineries in Merano and Environs. Other private wineries also offer high quality local specialties, often available only in small quantities, including the Kränzel, Juval, Falkenstein and Poppohof wineries.

Every year in November, the best winemakers from around the world meet at the **Merano WineFestival** at the Merano Kurhaus building.

Traditional South Tyrolean Cuisine

The traditional inns and mountain huts in South Tyrol's valleys and mountains offer guests a variety of dishes from the local peasant cuisine. These typically serve seasonal vegetables and dishes, such as dumplings, roast lamb, the typical **South Tyrolean Marende** (bacon, crispy schüttelbrot flatbread and cheese) and apple strudel in a traditional setting. The valleys around Merano are all home to local culinary specialties, such as roast lamb and goat and sweet snow milk in the Schnalstal Valley, organic bread from the Ultner Brot bakery in the Ultental Valley which is now famous far beyond the valley itself, and beer from the two small breweries in the Passeiertal Valley.

Real Quality in the Mountains

The *Echte Qualität am Berg* (Real Quality in the Mountains) initiative was launched in 2009 by Merano Marketing to highlight mountain huts and shelters in Merano and Environs which focus on authenticity in their businesses, with particular dedication to the use of their own high quality products for the preparation of food. A plaque with the inscription *Echte Qualität am Berg* is awarded to these establishments of excellence. An app of the same name lists all such designated mountain huts, together with tour itineraries and local recipes. The accompanying book relates personal and humorous stories from everyday life and the working lives of farmers and innkeepers (Athesia Verlag, EUR 19.90).

Fall is “Törggelen” Season

In South Tyrol, the Törggelen season begins after the autumn grape harvest. **Törggelen is an old custom**, observed mainly along the South Tyrol Wine Route (Südtiroler Weinstraße), in the Eisacktal Valley, and in Merano and Environs. It is well-loved by locals because of the **great degree of socializing involved**. Young and old, friends and family, football clubs and music choirs all meet every year for Törggelen, between late September and the end of November. This festive approach helps keep the South Tyrolean tradition alive. Homemade dumplings (filled with bacon, cheese or beetroot), *Schlutzkrapfen* (South Tyrolean spinach ravioli), homemade sausages and sauerkraut are served. For dessert, there are sweet donuts or the much coveted **Keschn**, chestnuts roasted on the open fire. This is usually accompanied by *Sußer*, a sweet grape must. ‘Törggelen’ derives from the word *torggl*, which in local South Tyrolean dialect is the word for a wine press, and not from *torkeln* or to stumble, as some mistakenly presume.

Reminiscing and New Interpretations

In addition to local cuisine, Merano’s **top chefs** offer a comprehensive selection of fine dishes. Currently, five chefs are working in restaurants in and around Merano who have been awarded either one, or even two, Michelin stars (at Trenkerstube, Sissi, Zum Löwen, Preidlhof, Kuppelrain). They create new variations on classical South Tyrolean dishes and enrich the traditional approach with modern and exotic flourishes.

Increasingly, small family businesses are also open to such new interpretations. For example, since 2010, the **Sandwiesnhof** farm in Gargazzone/Gargazon has been offering sparkling cider, the **Wegleithof** farm in the Ultental Valley produces honey vinegar with rose petals and strawberries, and the Hofbrennerei **Unterortl** distillery at Juval Castle, which is owned by the mountaineer **Reinhold Messner**, offers exquisite muscat grape brandy.

Farmers sell their own produce at the **Merano Market** or at local **farmers’ markets**. Fresh fruits and vegetables are on display next to herbal teas, jams and liqueurs.

Pur Südtirol is a project launched by Günther Hölzl und Ulrich Wallnöfer in 2010, to encourage a return to the use of regional and authentic products. The shop in Merano is located directly in the Kurhaus building, and offers organic farm products such as bacon, cheese, bread and wine, all sourced exclusively from South Tyrolean farmers and producers.

Alpine and Mediterranean

Merano’s charm lies in its unique combination of rural and traditional fare with Mediterranean flair. This can be seen in its typical coffee culture: locals stop several times a day for a **caffé al volo**, a “quick coffee” in one of the city’s numerous cafés. For breakfast, these cafés offer Italian-style *brioche*, *alla crema*, *al cioccolato* or *simply vuoto*, without filling.

The town’s restaurants offer **antipasti and risotto** alongside **Speckknödel** (bacon dumplings) and **Kaiserschmarren** (sweet pancakes). In addition to the local **Schüttelbrot**, a hard flatbread made from rye flour and spices, *Grissini* breadsticks are also served. Even an **Aperitivo**, accompanied by olives, dried tomatoes and ham, is increasingly popular. During the warmer months in particular, South Tyroleans enjoy meeting in a bar after work. South Tyroleans combine this Mediterranean custom with their own local ingredients. The *Hugo*, a well-known cocktail made from Prosecco and elder syrup with mint leaves and a slice of lime, was created in a bar in the village of Naturno/Naturns near Merano. Just for fun, Roland Gruber created the cocktail as a refreshing alternative to the popular bitter *Veneziano* aperitif, and simply called it Hugo.

Outstanding culinary delights and the unique combination of Alpine and Mediterranean cuisine in the local bars, restaurants and hotels is not surprisingly for many guests a **key reason** to visit South Tyrol.