

Press Release

Merano and Environs

Wellbeing

Terme Merano, the thermal baths of Merano, was opened in 2005 as a modern building in the middle of town with a fitness center and park and offering a variety of spa treatments. The spa tradition has a long history in Merano/Meran. Baths, gardens and promenades have been maintained for over 150 years for the relaxation of locals and visitors alike.

When the spa industry in Merano first began, the main priority was the health of spa guests. Today, alongside the health aspects, care is also taken to see that visitors feel comfortable and relaxed. As South Tyrol's second largest city, Merano with its 40,000 inhabitants is an easily manageable place, which due to its mild winter climate, it is visited not only in summer but also during the spring and fall. In summer, when temperatures are higher, the nearby villages and valleys are also popular destinations due to their fresh air.

Terme Merano

The tradition of thermal baths in Merano started around the turn of the 20th century. In the Kurhaus building, baths and inhalation treatments were offered. The **thermal waters at Vigiljoch** were only discovered in 1934. Since that time, the people of Merano had dreamed of a large thermal bathing center. In 1972 S.A.L.V.A.R. opened. Although more modest than originally planned, it became a landmark in the city. In the 1990s, South Tyrol/Südtirol finally commissioned work on a new building.

The new Terme Merano opened in 2005, and today is a benchmark for all who know and love Merano. It has a variety of 25 pools of different temperatures, with a total of 2,000 square meters of water surface. The sauna area is 1,300 square meters in size. In addition, the spa also features an on-site fitness center, a medical spa, where alongside thermal cures with inhalations and baths, physiotherapy treatments are also offered, a separate spa area and a spacious park. The park is one of the largest in Europe: in the 51,000 square meter area, not only Mediterranean plants but also 500 different types of water lilies grow. With its ten pools, the thermal park is used as an open-air swimming pool (or lido, as the locals call it) in summer.

Cosmetic applications in the Terme Merano are largely made **from local ingredients from South Tyrol/Südtirol**. Mountain pine, hay, wool and wild herbs from South Tyrol provide the basic materials. Peels with apple mousse, whey baths with fresh organic milk from the Passeiertal Valley, and rich grapeseed oil from **the Meraner Kurtraube grape** are used against skin aging and to promote smooth skin. Natural products from the Alps with their valuable and beneficial ingredients are also used at many spa hotels in the region.

How it Began

Imagine Merano in the **mid-19th century**: at the time, this small Alpine town was already known as a **climatic spa destination**. With its Mediterranean temperatures, Merano offered patients suffering from lung disease the mild and dry climate they needed to recover. They were encouraged to stay outdoors for long hours and to move around in the parks and on the hiking trails and promenades. The grape cure was also extremely popular. For this, up to one kilogram of Meraner Kurtraube grapes, a Graubernatsch variety, were consumed each day. This cleansed the body, improved digestion and brain function, and increased the functions of the liver and gallbladder.

Before Merano had its own thermal springs, the baths in nearby **Ultental Valley** were particularly popular. Bad Lad, Lotterbad, Überwasser, and especially Mitterbad, between S. Pancrazio/St.

Pankraz and S. Valburga/St. Walburg, were all known for their healing properties. The iron and mineral-rich water found there was used for **drinking cures and baths** and also used to treat nervous disorders, gynecological diseases and anemia. Several well-known personalities visited here: **Otto von Bismarck** and **Empress Elisabeth of Austria-Hungary**, as well as the brothers **Thomas and Heinrich Mann**. Thomas Mann is even said to have completed his famous work “The Buddenbrooks” here.

In particular, the visit of Empress Elisabeth of Austria-Hungary with her sick daughter Marie Valerie, gave the city of Merano a lift. The personal physician of the imperial family had prescribed the ailing Marie Valerie to stay in a mild climate. When Sissi, as she is familiarly known today, first came to Merano in 1870 almost 6,000 people eagerly awaited her arrival and high-level visit. But Sissi drove past the crowd – nobody realized that she in fact was sitting in the first, unostentatious carriage. A walking trail was laid for the Empress around Trauttmansdorff Castle, as she loved long walks. Nothing was too much trouble for the satisfaction of the noble guests.

After Marie Valerie was cured, the “Meraner Zeitung” newspaper wrote that Merano was only slightly behind “southern resorts such as Nice.” In a short time Merano became known as an elegant spa resort, and instead of ‘rooms’, ‘*chambres a louer*’ were offered, and prices raised accordingly. Anyone who was anyone came to visit this Alpine town. Renowned spa doctors and entrepreneurs settled there, further spurring the development of spa tourism. With the opening of the first **spa facility** in 1874, the town finally had its own public swimming baths, where alongside **inhalations**, bath tubs and steam baths, sports equipment was available. Spa guests were recommended to spend at least twelve hours a day outdoors, in the mild air on “**the south-facing balcony of the Danube monarchy**.” Parks and walking trails for leisurely walks emerged and promenades were created along the Passer river. The Vinschgau Valley based spa physician Franz Tappeiner built **Tappeinerweg** trail on a sunny slope above Merano, where Mediterranean flora thrives and the winter climate is particularly mild. The turn of the 20th century in particular was marked by a construction boom, this time based around **grand hotels and villas**, which characterize the city until today.

Spa Town in Bloom

The elegant spa town pulsed with life: at the newly built municipal theater, concerts, plays and operettas were held every evening. The *Kurorchester* spa orchestra played daily in its own pavilion on the promenade. The crème de la crème of society mingled in Merano, and alongside nobles and moneyed aristocracy, numerous world-famous musicians and writers were also to be found: the pianist and composer **Clara Schumann**, wife of Robert Schumann, came several times to the spa town with her son Felix, who suffered from tuberculosis. The Norwegian composer **Edvard Grieg** spent a vacation at Labers Castle. **Franz Liszt** spent time in Marlenigo/Marling, and it was there that he composed the song “Ihr Glocken von Marling”. Major figures of the international music scene such as **Giacomo Puccini, Cosima Wagner, Richard Strauss, and Arnold Schoenberg** visited Merano and its surroundings around this time.

No less famous names could be found among the literati: **Stefan Zweig, Christian Morgenstern and Arthur Schnitzler** all visited the spa town on the Passer river, while **Thomas and Heinrich Mann** were guests in Ultental Valley and **Rainer Maria Rilke** stayed at Leberberg Castle above Cermes/Tscherms. Zweig’s prose study “Herbstwinter in Meran” and the poem “Abends hinunter” by Christian Morgenstern are just two texts that bear witness to these visits. **Franz Kafka** stayed here in 1920, and wrote his famous “Briefe an Milena”.

As an international city, after the 1870s Merano “upgraded” itself to a **multi-religious** place: In addition to the local **Jewish community**, which had its own synagogue, there were also **Protestant**,

Russian Orthodox and Anglican religious communities in Merano, all with their respective churches and cemeteries. **Kosher hotels and restaurants** attracted Jewish guests, and several sanatoriums were run by Jewish spa physicians. The traditional **Martinsbrunn Clinic** in Quarazze/Gratsch near Merano was opened in 1890 as a sanatorium by the Jewish neurologist Dr. Norbert von Kaan. As a sanatorium it became well known for its modern treatment methods, and attracted prominent people such as the musician **Max Reger**. Today this private clinic is run by the Order of the Sisters of Mercy. In addition to in-patient cures, numerous outpatient treatments and checkups are offered in a stress-free atmosphere.

The Garden Town of Merano

Merano's image has always benefited from overseas influences. This also applies to the gardens of the city. The colorful landscaped **Kurpromenade** trail turns into the **Winterpromenade** trail on the orthographic right and sunny side of the Passer river, where it is warm even in winter. The **Wandelhalle** covered walk provided shelter and invited those seeking relaxation – stopping at this jewel of Merano Art Nouveau today, one can easily imagine women with sun umbrellas and long dresses and men in elegant suits with walking sticks strolling here. On the opposite bank of the river, which is more sheltered from the sun, is the **Sommerpromenade** trail. Here, the **Gilfpromenade trail** connects to the Sommerpromenade – it leads into the gorge which the Passer river has eroded through the Zenoberg mountain, and then up again on the other side of the river until reaching the Tappeinerweg trail, which extends beyond the city to the neighboring village of Quarazze. Alongside the promenades with their cafés and ice cream parlors, there are also numerous smaller parks scattered throughout the city, including the Elizabeth Park at the entrance to the Summerpromenade, or the Rosegger and Schiller Park in the Maia Alta/Obermais district.

In addition to hiking and walking trails, the **Waalwege** trails in Merano and Environs are ideal for leisurely walks. Because these paths are neither particularly high nor steep, they are particularly suitable for families. The **Waale**, along which the pathways run, formerly served as irrigation channels. Today the **Meraner Waalrunde** Circuit Trail combines eleven of these trails.

The largest and the most beautiful gardens in Merano are the **Gardens of Trauttmansdorff Castle**. Perched on the slopes under the castle of the same name, they attract around 400,000 visitors annually. In 2005 they received the award for the most beautiful garden in Italy. In 2013, they were named the "**International Garden of the Year**" in Canada, and subsequently classed amongst the most beautiful botanical gardens in the world. In addition to numerous exotic and native plants, there are also greenhouses and thematic gardens. In summer, evening concerts take place at the *Seerosenteich* lily pond, which have hosted the likes of *Revolverheld*, *Klangkarussell*, and the John Butler Trio. The gardens also play host to other programs as well: from dragonfly guided tours to *Aperitivo Lungo* on mild summer nights.

Between 1870 and 1897, **Empress Elisabeth** visited Merano four times, residing twice at Trauttmansdorff Castle, and the **Emperor Franz Josef I** himself visited once. Such prominent guests greatly influenced the history of tourism in Merano – it is not for nothing that Trauttmansdorff is regarded as an ideal place for a museum dedicated to the history of tourism. At the **Touriseum**, visitors can experience an interactive display across 20 rooms on the development of tourism in Tyrol. Even today, the visits of the Emperor and his family are remembered at numerous places in the town. Visitors can walk along the Sissi-Weg trail from the center of Merano to Maia Alta and Trauttmansdorff Castle. The Sissi statue in the Elizabeth Park is one of the town's landmarks, and many hotels, restaurants and spa treatments refer to the imperial visits. In Terme Merano, a whey bath is named after Empress Sissi, while in the Gardens of Trauttmansdorff Castle, every week in summer on the "Sissi Terrace", "Breakfast at Sissi" is offered, and the Meran Burggräfler Winery headquartered in Marleno/Marling serves the multiple award-winning dessert wine "Sissi", a blend

of Goldmuskateller and Gewürztraminer varieties. Perhaps one or another guest also dreams that after their relaxing stay in Merano they will feel as “beautiful as Sissi”, as mentioned in a famous headline in the *Wiener Zeitung* newspaper.

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