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DESTINATION ITALY

Ancient home of Prosecco is all sparkles

Beyond Venice, vines beckon. By Winsor Dobbin.

PROSECCO is the most popular sparkling wine in the world, easily outselling Champagne. It is also a mesmerizingly beautiful wine region that is home to one of the world's oldest vineyard trails, small villages with serious charm and plenty of beautiful locations in which to enjoy a glass of bubbles paired with local gourmet treats.

Here visitors can enjoy a heady cocktail of wine, food, art, history, and spectacular scenery. Until a few years ago, Prosecco was the name of an obscure grape variety grown in a dirt-poor part of north-eastern Italy.

It then morphed into the name of a wine region - the grape variety was re-named glera - and the easy drinking wine style became a global success story: partially driven by the popularity of Aperol spritzes and bellinis.

With the main towns of Treviso, Valdob-

biadene and Conegliano all within an hour of the tourism magnet that is Venice, the greater Veneto region has become increasingly popular with wine-loving tourists.

The hills of Prosecco across Conegliano and Valdobbiadene were named as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2019, but luckily the region has managed to retain much of its slow-paced rural Italian charm.

There are dozens of cellars where visitors are welcome to browse, along with a wide selection of restaurants, bars and even one of Italy's most exclusive cooking schools.

There are some remarkable vineyard views on the 90-kilometre Prosecco Road trail, which winds its way past some of the most expensive vines in the world, many of them on steep inclines where grapes must be tended by hand. The *Strada del Prosecco* was set up in 1966, the first recognised Wine Route in Italy.



Cellar doors

Grape growing has been widespread in the Conegliano Valdobbiadene zone since ancient times. A memorial stone recalls the words of a Roman centurion, mentioning the *vendemmiales*, celebrations on the occasion of the grape harvest.

For a good range of winery experiences, visit tiny artisan Mongarda - where you can also sample the rare still wines made from

glera; and the medium-sized L'Antica Quercia, where there is a focus on sustainability. Meet family members at fourth-generation La Tordera and make time for an exploration of grand Villa Sandi, one of the region's big guns well set up for international tourists.

Bars and restaurants

The family-owned Antica Osteria di Via Brandolini in the hamlet of Solighetto is

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Clockwise from main: Rolle village and Prosecco vineyards; Antica Osteria; time to pour. **Picture: Getty Images**

a perfect lunch choice. Here you can eat al fresco in the pretty garden, or inside on cooler days. There is a welcoming atmosphere with great staff, while the cuisine is traditional and very tasty. Spit-roasted meat dishes are a speciality of chef Giovanni Perenzin.

For an early supper try the Osteria Collalbrigo in a small hamlet of Collalbrigo in the hills outside Conegliano. There is a wide selection of regional wines from which to match with the local cuisine in this family-owned former tavern, where the menu combines tradition and modern influences. Think beef carpaccio, or wild boar ragu. Sit on the terrace, which is heated in winter, and enjoy the superb views across the vineyards.

For a more upmarket experience rustic hideaway Locanda Sandi - owned by the family that operates the benchmark Villa Sandi winery - is a spectacular country

dining experience, while Seda Ristorante in Vittorio Veneto pairs the fresh air of the Prosecco hills, with star chef Alessandro Favrin's gastronomic offering a 90 euro set menu or a la carte choices. This is a serious foodie destination with views to match.

Also check out the traditional cuisine at Casa Caldart in Valdobbiadene, a popular spot with locals.

Locals recommend Da Gigetto in Miane, which is home to one of Italy's most impressive and well-stocked wine cellars and serves food "where tradition meets innovation". It is one of the oldest restaurants in the region and has been run by the same family for more than 120 years.

In downtown Treviso, which was the birthplace of tiramisu, seek out Osteria all'Antico Palone, a ridiculously atmospheric little wine bar that's a perfect spot for enjoying a glass of vino and a snack.

Where to picnic, or learn to cook

Take a tiny laneway from beside the Col Vettoraz winery in Valdobbiadene and enjoy a picnic while taking in some stunning vineyard views. Alternatively, pop into the Osteria Senz'Oste for a glass of chilled prosecco.

The tiny vineyard village of Rolle offers views as far as the eye can see and has several excellent picnic spots on the edge of the vineyards. In the town of Treviso there are several outstanding delicatessens from which to pick up local cheeses and cured meats - which can then be enjoyed in one of the many parks next to the canals.

For a real taste of the region, OurRustica is a lovely rural B&B retreat and hands-on cooking school run by Anglo-Italian couple Ruth Moorhouse and Andrea Conte, an

Italian chef who stepped out of city life for the charms of the country. The duo has a passion for living off the land and going back to nature and has rebuilt a rundown, uninhabitable, overgrown, yet characterful house in the Valdobbiadene area that they took over when it had no roof, running water, or electricity. OurRustica offers bespoke cookery courses for couples and small groups.

Winsor Dobbin flew with Emirates, and was a guest of the Consorzio Tutela del Vino Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco DOCG.

TRIP NOTES

Getting there: Visitors can travel by train from Venice to Conegliano or Treviso but will need a car or driver to explore the region properly. Roberta at proseccowinetour.net is a charming guide with amazing local contacts.

Staying there: The comfortable older-style Canon d'Oro hotel (hotelcanondoro.it) is in the heart of the small town of Conegliano, just a short stroll to several outstanding restaurants and bars. Just outside town, Relais Le Betulle (relaislebetulle.com) is a modern resort hotel overlooking the vines.

Relais Ca Milone (camilone.com) is a charming country house B&B and restaurant with its own helicopter pad for anyone wanting to enjoy the region from the air. In the centre of a 10-hectare wine estate this green oasis has its own swimming pool.

In the town of Treviso, you can find quirky and affordable town centre apartments at Palazzina 300 (palazzina300.com), which overlooks the busy Piazza dei Signori.

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