

BOLZANO/BOZEN INTRODUCTION

The Dolomites are a wild and rugged mountain range in northeastern Italy.

Their characteristic jagged peaks, lush

meadows, and charming alpine villages set this region apart from the rest of the Alps.

Dolomite is a sedimentary rock similar to limestone. Like limestone, Dolomite is softer than most other rock types. Consequentially, the mountains have eroded over the ages, leaving stunning jagged peaks and ridgelines. These jagged peaks, often bathed in warm pink hues at sunrise and sunset, have inspired the name *Enrosadira*. I translate this roughly as “the pinks tell all.”

This mountain range offers a paradise for outdoor enthusiasts. Summer welcomes hikers and climbers to explore trails that weave



through lush green valleys and ascend to panoramic vistas. The winter months transform the Dolomites into a snowy wonderland, attracting skiers, snowboarders, and those simply seeking a winter wonderland.

The Dolomites also hold cultural significance, as a mix of Italian, Austrian, and Ladin influences has shaped the region. Charming villages like Bolzano and Castelrotto showcase a blend of architectural styles. Local traditions add a distinct flavor to the region's character.



Although we are in Italy, you will likely hear German spoken first, with Italian running a distant second.

Over the centuries, this region has been controlled by the Romans, The Holy Roman Empire, and the Austrian Hapsburgs. It was divvied up to Italy after World War I and became a part of the *Alto Adige*. In the 1930s, Mussolini tried to “Italianize” the area by

giving Italian names to towns. Thus, Bolzano (Italian) and Bozen (German) are the same place. Take a walk across the Talavera River into the new fascist-styled city to look at 20th-century Bolzano.

Bolzano/Bozen has well-preserved medieval architecture within the historic Old Town, featuring charming cobblestone streets, colorful facades, and Gothic-style buildings. Bolzano's noted museum is the **South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology**, home to Ötzi the Iceman, a 5,300-year-old mummy discovered in the nearby Ötztal Alps.

Surrounded by vineyards and orchards, Bolzano is a haven for food enthusiasts. The region is known for its culinary delights, including the famed South Tyrolean wines and delicious alpine dishes. The bustling markets, such as the Bozen Market, offer a feast with fresh produce, local cheeses, and artisanal goods.

THE CHRISTMAS MARKETS

Mercatino di Natale Bolzano/Bozener Christkindlmarkt

Bolzano transforms into a winter wonderland during the Christmas season. Its central Christmas Market, on *Piazza Walther*, is lit up with twinkling lights, festive firs, and wooden vendor stalls combining Alpine charm with holiday spirit. From late November to January, the old town comes alive with roasted chestnuts, mulled wine, and the sweet aroma of traditional South Tyrolean pastries.

The stalls, adorned with twinkling lights and festive decorations, offer an array of hand-made crafts, Christmas ornaments, and local delicacies. Bolzano's Christmas markets showcase the region's cultural heritage, with artisans displaying intricate woodcarvings, handcrafted ornaments, and traditional Tyrolean textiles.

Often, you'll hear the sounds of Christmas carols and live music performances that

echo through the narrow cobbled streets. Families and friends gather to enjoy the cheerful ambiance, with children's laughter filling the air as they explore the merry-go-rounds and other amusement rides. And let's not forget the food and drink. Local food vendors offer a tempting array of South Tyrolean specialties, including hearty sausages, flavorful cheeses, and aromatic spices.

***Via Laurin* Market Park**

Another Christmas Market occupies the park near the Hotel Laurin. The ven-



dors here specialize in authentic handmade goods, jewelry, and textiles. You'll find gifts and items here that are unavailable from Piazza Walther's vendors.

EXPERIENCES IN BOLZANO

Via dei Portici/Laubengasse

In the 12th century, this was the main drag, the only street in town. I suggest you arrive at this street from Piazza Walther through Piazza del Grano/Kornplatz (see my map).

Behind the arches (*Portici/Lauben*) are shops selling everything from shoes and jewelry to sporting and home goods. This is where the locals come to shop in the old town. Enjoy watching the crowds. Pop into a shop or two to see what's popular.

Heading west, notice the pointed arches decorated with fresco paintings at #30. This is the City Hall, the street's only gothic building. The other structures, dating from the Renaissance and beyond, all have rounded arches with portico-arcades. A design unique to Tirol, these shade the merchant's shops in the summer and protect them from snow in the winter.

Farther along the street, you'll find a balcony on the Mercantile building. This is the old town's only building built during the Baroque era.

At the intersection, you'll find *Piazza Erbe/Obstplatz*. Most days, you'll find an outdoor produce market surrounding the town's market fountain with a Baroque statue of Neptune.

At the fountain, the street changes names to *via Museo*. It is an appropriate name because it leads to Bolzano's best museum.

Don't miss a visit to learn about Ötzi the Iceman at the **South Tirol Museum of Archaeology** (*Museo Archeologico dell'Alto Adige/Südtiroler Archäologiemuseum*). Wow, that's a mouthful!



Inside, learn about the wandering warrior who was murdered five millennia ago. I advise going later in the day, around 4:00 -5:00 pm, to avoid the crowds. You can zip through the entire

exhibit in about 30 minutes or spend an hour reading all the place cards. Open Tuesday to Sunday, 10:00-18:00. Your *Museummobil card* covers the entrance.

Consider taking a stroll across the river from the museum for a walk in the “new” fascist town. Crossing the River Talvera, notice the park and *Piazza della Vittoria*. Continue on the wide street, *Corso de Libertà*, and see the stark white and straight-lined architecture designed in the 1930s Fascist style. Don't worry, it is perfectly safe. Have a seat at a wine bar or local restaurant and enjoy! Walk a bit farther to *Osteria da Marco*, my favorite restaurant on this side of the river.

Osteria da Marco serves a small menu of authentic Northern Italian fare. Local wine is cheap. Have a seat, order spaghetti and meatballs or an antipasti platter. You'll not regret it! *Via della Zecca Münzbankweg*. 12:00-15:00 and 18:00-22:30. Closed Mondays.

EXPERIENCES BEYOND BOLZANO

Lift to Oberbozen/ and Renon/Ritten

The *Funivia del Renon/Rittner Seilbahn*, or Renon Cable Car, provides a quick escape from the valley of Bolzano to the alpine villages, meadows, and forests in the hills. Connecting the town of Bolzano to the charming village of Soprabolzano in just 12 minutes, this cable car offers a breathtaking journey through the landscapes of the Renon Plateau. In good weather, passengers enjoy panoramic views of the Dolomite Mountains, rolling hills, and vineyards that characterize the region. The journey is particularly enchanting during sunrise or sunset when the play of light on the mountains and valleys creates a magical pink patina (*Enrosadira*) to the distant jagged Dolomite peaks.



The cable car's valley station is five blocks east of the train station and an easy and flat 15-minute walk from Piazza Walther. Look for it along Via Renon/Rittnerstrasse. The cars depart every four minutes, Mon-Sun 06:30-22:45, Sun 7:10-22:45. Included free with your *Museummobil card*, otherwise €12 round-trip. <https://www.sii.bz.it>.

The Sopra Bolzano/Oberbozen and Collalbo/Klobenstein villages may have Christ-kindl activities and markets open when you visit. They are more likely to kick off later in the day. However, regardless of the time you visit, the lift and railway are a must-do to experience all the area has to offer.

Sopra Bolzano/Oberbozen

At an elevation of 4000 feet, you are in the mountains! In the summer, it is touristy and filled with



spa-hotels. Hikers abound with walking sticks headed out to the trails. But, in the winter, it is a wonderland, especially if there is snow. During the Christmas season, you are likely to find a cozy fire pit, a few vendors, and mulled wine brewing when stepping off the cable car.

Across the piazza is the Renon/Rittener train station. The narrow-gauge railway is the only one of its kind in South Tirol. The journey from *Oberbozen to Klobenstein* whisks through alpine forests, farms, and villages and affords magnificent views of the Dolomite peaks. In 18 minutes, you'll arrive in Collalbo/Klobenstein.

Collalbo/Klobenstein

The narrow-gauge railway ends at Collalbo/Klobenstein at 3800 feet. Locals use this train to get around. Don't be surprised to find kids taking their break or eating lunch at the station bar/restaurant on school days.

Out the door of the station, you'll find fine views across the valley. Heading left, down the road leads to the village. Follow the



BOLZANO/BOZEN MAP

signs. When you come to some steps on the right, take them to the village square. There are a few shops, grocery stores, and restaurants. In the summer, this place is busy. But, in the winter, shops may close on certain days or at midday. Follow via Peter Mayr to the Frilo Market, the local grocery store. Beyond are several resort hotels with cozy wooden rooms, similar to Herman's place in Reutte. The **Hotel Bemelman's Post** has a fine restaurant, which I have found open during November and December.

RESTAURANT GUIDE

Ca' de Bezzi/Gasthaus Batzenhäusl - The oldest inn in town serves traditional Tirolean fare such as pasta, stews, pork, and sweets. It is famous for the many local beers brewed here and in the surrounding hills. Open daily from 12:00-15:00 and 18:00-24:00. Via Andreas Hofer/Andreas Hoferstrasse.

Walther's - Located right on the main square, Walther's has an outdoor terrace, an indoor bar and pizzeria, and a nice upscale restaurant. Serving simple pizza and bar food at terrace and bar. The menu is more refined and varied in the small restaurant. Reservations are a must! Open daily 12:30-14:30 and 18:00-22:30. Piazza Walther, 6/2, 39100 Bolzano.

Paulaner Stuben - Serving Bavarian & Italian dishes, from pork knuckle to pizza, in a 1200s building. Locally brewed beer plus the signature Paulaner beer from Munich. Piazza Erbe/Obstplatz 17. Open daily from 09:30-24:00.

Osteria da Marco serves a small menu of authentic Northern Italian fare. Local wine is cheap. Have a seat, order spaghetti and meatballs or an antipasti platter. You'll not regret it! *Via della Zecca Münzbankweg. 12:00-15:00 and 18:00-22:30. Closed Mondays.*

Hotel Bemelman's Post - Collalbo/ Klobenstein

This alpine hotel and restaurant serves homemade pasta, rich stews, and good wine. Openings are uncertain in the winter, but I've always found it open when I visit on Christmas tours. Via del Paese, 8, 39054 Collalbo sul Renon.