



# EASTERN ALPS AND THE DOLOMITES

TRENTINO-ALTO ADIGE, FRIULI-VENEZIA GIULIA AND VENETO

**T**he north-eastern region of Italy has it all; high glaciated peaks, the spectacular Dolomites, plus the historically and culturally rich lowlands of Venice and Verona. Just passing through is not good enough, you'll miss out on some of the most spectacular roads and scenery in the world... and we're not just being sensationalist there.

## WHERE IS IT?

The Italian regions of Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Veneto stretch from the Swiss border in the west to the Slovenian border in the east. It's no hyperbole when I say they contain some of the most dramatic mountain scenery in the world plus there's the rich culture and spectacular cities of Venice and Verona.

If I could choose only one destination to tour on a motorcycle, then the north east corner of Italy would be it. In my view, the Dolomites and surrounding mountain ranges are unparalleled when it comes to jaw-dropping scenery and equally spectacular roads.

The jagged limestone towers and huge precipitous cliff faces are surreal in both scale and setting, and the good news is that there are roads to take you to every corner of this magnificent area.

If you've never been to the Dolomites and need a quick fix of what's on offer, check out the opening scene in the Sylvester Stallone film *Cliffhanger*. The story may be set in the USA's Rocky Mountains but, when it came to the filming, they shot the dramatic scene in the Dolomites, near the town of Cortina.

I'd imagine most riders from the UK will enter the north-east region either via the Brenner Pass from Innsbruck or via the Resia Pass from Nauders, both in Austria. If via the latter, then I'd ad-

vise you check out the Central Alps and continue via the Stelvio, Gavia and Tonale Passes and onto Madonna di Campiglio, which is a fine place to over-night.

During my climbing years, the jagged Brenta Dolomites overlooking the town were my go-to mountains. However, unless you're feeling in the mood for a spot of hiking or climbing, my route suggestion here heads south to Ponte Arche and then north through Andalo and onto Cavareno. These are all fine roads through spectacular scenery and there are more apple orchards than you'll be able to count.

The twisty road from Cavareno to Bolzano offers fantastic views over the Trentino Valley and the main Dolomite region beyond. From Bolzano to Canazei in the Fassa Valley you can't take a bad road, but I'm going to advise you seek out this little gem of a route we discovered on our recent trip.

Take the SS12 out of Bolzano heading north east until you reach the small village of Prato Isarco Blumau and take the side road to Collepietra - the LS132. We would never have found this road unless the tunnel on the main SS241 out of Bolzano was closed, but we sure are glad that we did.

It's a fantastic bikers' road with masses of hairpins, climbs and descents. Better still, this is a seldom-used road with light traffic and, once you reach the high plateau, the views of the limestone mountains which await you are stunning. The LS132 eventually joins back up with the SS241 after a hugely enjoyable staircase of hairpins.

Next up, take the SS241 to Vigo di Fassa making sure to stop off at the turquoise Lake Carezza to view the awesome rock spires of the Catinaccio Group. From Vigo, it's a short ride up the valley to Canazei and the start of the circular route around the Sella Massif (see highlight on next page).

Following a loop of the Sella Massif we head east of Canazi on the SS641 which passes beneath the glaciated slopes of the mighty Marmolada, the highest summit in the Dolomites at 3,343m. At Saviner di Laste we turn north to join the SR48 and onto the famous Falzarego Pass and cable car.

If you're into your World War One history, this is a 'must stop' as the rock face that the cable car ascends was the location of multiple bloody battles between Italian and Austrian troops. This culminated with the Italians packing the cliff faces below the summit ridge with hundreds of tonnes of explosives and literally blowing the mountain up. The evidence is there for you to see in the form of a slope of scree and boulders that were created in the blast.

From Falzarego it's a short and scenic ride down into Cortina. From Cortina head for the village of Campolongo making sure to check out the amazing spectacle of Tre Cime di Lavaredo, three remarkable rocky peaks, along the way.

In Campolongo take a right onto the Strad Provinciale 465 and be prepared to be amazed. The 465 sees very little traffic and you're about to find out why. At roughly half way you'll come across a bizarre set of switchbacks in the middle of nowhere. Above the switchbacks, the road turns to off-road trail and can be either tricky or reasonably easy depending on the weather and if there's been any landslips during the winter.

At the end of the trail, take a right towards Lago di Sauris. The setting for this lake is sublime and so it the Via di Valentino single track road at the head of the lake. Once over the pass, the Valentino joins the SS52 and just past Tolmezzo you can turn left for more spectacular mountain scenery and great roads around Tarvisio or head south on the A23 to Venice.