



The *Decanter* travel guide to

Valpolicella, Verona, Italy

FACT FILE

Valpolicella & Amarone

planted area: 7,564ha

Main grapes: Corvina,

Corvinone, Molinara,

Rondinella, Oseleta

Appellations:

Valpolicella DOC,

Valpolicella Ripasso DOC,

Amarone DOCG,

Recioto DOCG

Climate: mild with a little rainfall

Main soil types:

calcareous, basaltic,

muddy clay

With its gracious villas and ancient churches, the valleys of Valpolicella harbour as much heritage as they do winemaking dynasties. Local Alessandra Piubello shows how to make the most of this inviting region

THIS HISTORICAL AND fascinating foothill area with its vineyard landscape is both magical and enchanting. The hills are a patchwork of lush Veronese pergola vineyards, criss-crossed by lines of *marogne*, the dry-stone walls typical of the region. Dotted here and there are cypress trees, ancient churches, age-old fountains and magnificent Venetian villas, all accompanied by the eternal gushing of *progni* (fast streams).

Colours capture the eye. The warm burnished pink of the local stone characterises the environment just as much as the bright green of the vines. We are heading northwest of Verona to Valpolicella, an area that extends over 240km², bordered by the Lessini Mountains in the north and the River Adige in the south, by the Val d'Adige in the west and the romantic city of Verona in the east. Lake Garda is just 15km further west.

The etymology of Valpolicella remains uncertain but the favoured interpretation, based on *val-policellae* from the Latin for cellar (*cellae*), is 'valley of many wineries', and vine-growing among these hills has always been a way of life. Fossil remains dating back to the Iron Age prove that the European vine, *Vitis vinifera sativa*, was cultivated here. And Greek and Roman literature makes numerous mentions of winemaking activities in Valpolicella, testifying to the importance that wine production in this region had in those times.



Pictures: Adert/ Jacopo Salvi

Above: with its historic centre and close proximity to the surrounding hills with their mosaic of vineyards, the town of Sant' Ambrogio di Valpolicella typifies the beautiful environment awaiting travellers to the region

Over the centuries, vine-growing expanded and became more specialised, mainly due to the area's particular geographical relief, featuring valleys running south to north. The identity and complexity of Valpolicella wines originates in these valleys, where warm breezes from Lake Garda meet the cool air from the Lessini Mountains, creating the ideal microclimate for growing vines as well as cherries and olives.

From volcanoes to clay

This varied geological conformation produces a diverse range of soils, thus giving the wines widely different characteristics. The historical zone, defined as classic, includes the three valleys of Fumane (stratified calcareous rock), Marano (basaltic volcanic rocks, known as Toari) and Negrar (muddy clay) from west to east, and the areas around St' Ambrogio di Valpolicella (calcareous soils) and San Pietro in Cariano (of ➤

My perfect day in Valpolicella

Morning

Start off with a good coffee and a home-made Amarone pastry at Rossini's in Santa Maria di Negrar (www.pasticceriarossini.com), one of the most famous confectioners in Verona. Then proceed to Negrar and, in just a few minutes, you are at Quintarelli in via Cerè 1 ([tel: +39 045 750 0016](tel:+390457500016), *best to book*), a historic, symbolic company with top-quality, internationally renowned wines. Basing its production on traditional methods, this highly awarded company has remained true to its Valpolicella origins. After a quick stop at Caprini's delicatessen in Negrar for its award-winning *soppressa salami* (www.macelleriacaprini.it), a 10-minute drive takes you to Speri (www.speri.com) in Pedemonte, another top name in Valpolicella, run by a historic, fifth-generation family whose origins date back to the late 19th century.

Lunch

Ten minutes to Fumane and the Enoteca della Valpolicella (www.enotecadellavalpolicella.it), where Ada, in a superbly renovated 15th century hayloft, serves high-quality, traditional Valpolicella cuisine with a creative touch, alongside an interesting wine list.

Afternoon

Moving on to Allegrini (www.allegrini.it), you soon arrive at the Renaissance-period Villa della Torre, an architectural treasure. The Allegrini family, residents in Valpolicella since the 16th century, founded the company in 1854. While the Allegrinis' winemaking and entrepreneurial history is impossible to summarise, their contribution in the 1980s was a determining factor in re-launching Valpolicella.



Franco Allegrini

A 10-minute drive brings you to Gargagnago and the Masi company premises (www.masi.it). Sandro Boscaini, patron of the family-run business (the Boscainis have been producing wine in Valpolicella since 1772) is known globally as Mister Amarone. The world's most authoritative ambassador of Amarone, Boscaini, a modest man, has brought fame to the territory. Do try, among others, Campofiorin Ripasso, the founding father of a new generation of Veronese wines. Enjoy an aperitif at Red Zone Art & Bar (www.redzoneart.com), an alternative location with art gallery, music and one of the area's most beautiful views in the square at San Giorgio in Valpolicella.

Evening and overnight

In 15 minutes you arrive at the Villa Quaranta Park Hotel (www.villaquaranta.com), a 17th-century villa set among parkland with a sumptuous, 2,500m² spa for a regenerating stay in a magical setting. For dinner decide whether to eat in Borgo Antico, the hotel's restaurant with its international menu, or cross the road to Trattoria Alla Coà (www.trattoriaallacoa.it), where the Beltramini family serves typical local dishes in a refined manner.



Caprini



Photographs: Scriani, Gyozyr

alluvial origin). Production regulations also include the Valpantena region with the Squaranto and Mezzane valleys, and East Valpolicella with Val d'Illasi and Val Tramigna (carbonate soils).

The area produces four wine styles: Amarone, Valpolicella, Valpolicella Ripasso and Recioto. Although made with the same grapes (Corvina, Corvinone, Rondinella and other lesser varieties), their winemaking techniques are different. Valpolicella, a historical illustration of ancient farming rhythms, is a fresh, spontaneous and enjoyable wine; the soft Ripasso ('re-passed' over Amarone pomace) is soft; and the two *passiti* brothers, Amarone and sweet Recioto, are made from dried grapes. Amarone has stolen the international limelight with its splendid concentration, structure, elegance and unique complexities. Power unites with a delightful softness, giving a durable opulence.

Wineries to visit

So where might you most enjoy tasting these? Why not start with San Pietro in Cariano, the heart of Valpolicella (the Roman church in San Floriano is also worth visiting), or Monte Dall'Orla (www.montedallora.com), six hectares of vineyard where biodiversity rules, producing biodynamic wines with an identifiable and well-interpreted style.

Nearby Brigaldara (www.brigaldara.it) has a refined stylistic code which results in austere and elegant wines with enormous personality.

Meanwhile, the co-op Cantina di Negrar (www.cantinanegrar.it) has recently built a visitor centre. Here you can stock up on quality wines without breaking the bank.

Not far away in Fumane, interesting places to visit include a prehistoric cave; the Molina Nature Reserve, an oasis of waterfalls set among woods with an adjoining botanical museum; the Madonna delle Salette Sanctuary, built in 1864 to seek protection from the devastation of phylloxera; and the boutique producer Scriani (www.scriani.it), with its tardis-like cellar. Lastly, Le Salette (www.lesalette.it), a wine-producing company established in the 19th century that makes complex, energetic wines.

Part of the wealth of the Valpolicella area lies in its ancient villas: taking a detour towards Gargagnago takes you to Villa Serego Alighieri (www.seregoalighieri.it/2011), which still belongs to the descendants of the poet Dante. Not far from here are the offices of the Strada del Vino wine route (www.stradadelvinovalpolicella.it), where you might be directed to Villa Mosconi Bertani in

'The warm burnished pink of the local stone characterises the environment just as much as the bright green of the vines'

Clockwise from top left: the hilly Brigaldara vineyards; the fifth-generation Speri family; taste the wines of leading Amarone producer, Romano Dal Forno; don't miss the beautiful Villa Mosconi Bertani, and the Molina Nature reserve; drying grapes destined for Amarone; refined cuisine at Ristorante Arquade

Your Valpolicella address book

Hotels

La Magioca Relais

High-class, elegant and charming hotel with gardens and a swimming pool. This Liberty and Colonial style private residence converted into a luxury B&B focuses on the well-being and comfort of its clients. An unforgettable romantic stay. www.magioca.it

Byblos Art, Villa Amistà

An 18th-century Venetian villa with gardens, frescoes and ancient relics, combined with modern interiors and international art exhibits. An original contemporary art museum with designer bedrooms, spa and swimming pool. www.byblosarthotel.com

Castrum Relais & Ristorante

Cleverly renovated, reasonably priced, 18th-century farmhouse with elegant rooms overlooking the Valpolicella valley. The management also runs the Osteria Castrum in an 18th century villa in the town's beautiful square, where local wines are available for tasting. www.castrumrelais.it

Villa Gesi Relais

An ancient country residence renovated according to the dictates of bio-architecture, surrounded by spacious gardens, with beautiful rooms and antique furniture. Here you can also enjoy *cioccolavini*, original home-produced Amarone chocolates. www.villagesi.it



I Sapori del Portico



La Magioca Relais

Restaurants

Caprini Trattoria

Authentic home cooking in a trattoria that dates back to 1907. After four generations the menu is still centred around local flavours, promoting tradition and wholesome products. The hand-made *lasagnette* should not be missed. Wide selection of local wines. www.trattoriacaprini.it

Dalla Rosa Alda

Dating back to 1853, the Dalla Rosa family has been handing down the secrets of traditional local cooking for generations. Enjoy simple yet authentic dishes from the organic vegetable garden, and healthy local produce. The wine cellar dug into the rock with its mainly Veronese selection is well worth a visit. www.dallarosalda.it

Groto de Corgnan

A reference point for classic Veronese dishes for over 30 years, the Soave family welcomes adventurers and makes them feel at home by serving typical dishes using fresh, seasonal ingredients. The restaurant's rustic style matches the tasty simplicity of the food. The lengthy wine list includes a good selection of local wines. www.grotodecorgnan.it

Ristorante Arquade

Located inside the Relais & Chateaux Villa del Quar in an exclusive and architecturally

unique environment surrounded by vineyards, the Arquade restaurant offers international cuisine with a creative imprint. Set among the vineyards, the luxury, class and perfect formal service of this restaurant make it a target for top gourmets. www.hotelvilladelquar.it/ristoranti-cantina/ristorante-arquade

Shops

I Sapori del Portico

A trip to Berardinelli's delicatessen is a must, but don't just look around the shop. Ask to be taken downstairs into the cheese-maturing caves and tasting room where you can try unique cheeses and wonderful cold cuts produced according to ancient traditions and combined with innovative recipes. www.saporidelportico.com

Enoteca Al Mulino

A charming atmosphere where stone and wood merge in one spacious area with a separate room for wine tasting and a bar for sipping an aperitif. Wonderful selection of local labels and vintage wines with over 300 names to choose from. **Via Santa Maria 44, Negrar; tel: +39 045 602 0800**

La Bottega di Corrado Benedetti

The Benedetti family has been offering a wide choice of specialities made by master sausage- and cheese-makers since the 1950s. The choice includes meats, typical cold cuts, seasoned and refined cheeses, preserves, jams and pickles. Picnics are allowed in the company's Bosco Allegro country gardens. www.corradobenedetti.it

How to get there ✈

Verona Airport is two hours from London by plane, and from there the Valpolicella area is 30 minutes by car, or 20 minutes from Verona's train station.

Arbizzano – arguably, the most beautifully sited villa in Valpolicella – here, Gaetano Bertani has the headquarters of his Santa Maria alla Pieve estate, complete with tours and wine shop (www.mosconibertani.it).

In Valpolicella free time can be spent on long walks, exploring the area on a mountain bike or on horseback (Circolo Ippico Valpolicella, +39 347 035 6560), or relaxing at the hot springs (www.aquardens.it). The surrounding areas further east are also very beautiful and it is no coincidence that Valpantena is known as 'the valley of all the gods'.

The historical Bertani company – founded in 1857 and an indisputable icon of Valpolicella – is located in Grezzana (www.bertani.net). Its wines continue to act as absolute reference points by uniting tradition and innovation.

Further east, at Cellore d'Ilasi, the winery of Romano Dal Forno (www.dalfornoromano.it) has affirmed himself as one of the best Amarone producers and leads the entire east Valpolicella area. His world-famous wines are intense, concentrated and the result of almost maniacal work in the vineyards. **D**

Veronese journalist, author and wine judge Alessandra Piubello writes for a number of leading Italian and international publications and wine guides