

# WELCOME TO BASSANO DEL GRAPPA



Province of Vicenza  
Tourist Information Office



# TOWN OF FINE ARTS

# WELCOME TO BASSANO DEL GRAPPA

## HISTORIC CENTRE

The inhabitants of Bassano have always been extremely attached to their land. This fact is manifest in their everyday activities, which have always had the purpose of bringing prosperity and grandeur to their town. The architectural context of Bassano has evolved over the centuries from this basic precept with its ensuing diversity of styles dating from the medieval era through to modern times. Jacopo Dal Ponte, Palladio, Marinali, Canova, Dall'Acqua are just some of the famous artists who have left their imprint on the town.

The streets of the historic centre are proof of the town's firmly entrenched commercial and handicraft tradition, which developed as a consequence of its fortuitous geographical position. You will enjoy stopping at the shop windows to admire the famous ceramics, the splendid creations of the blooming jewellery trade, the reproductions of precious Remondini prints, and the remarkable antique style reproduction furniture.



The town is encircled by rolling hills and boasts a mild climate for the North of Italy which even favours the plantation of olive groves. Bassano is also famous for its high quality agricultural products, in particular the white asparagus, and the distillation of grappa. Respect for the natural environment has been a major influence in the development of this well-balanced, human-scaled town.

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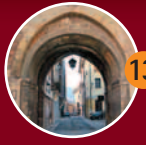
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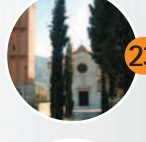
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1

## Viale dei Martiri

The visitor driving along the Valsugana Highway from Trento to Bassano on a warm summer's evening will enjoy one of the most beautiful views of the town. The boulevard, which stretches from the upper castle to the Porta delle Grazie, is enfolded in a magical golden atmosphere. Once the northern part of the boulevard was protected by medieval walls, which unfortunately were pulled down in 1886 in order to grant the wealthy families, whose magnificent residences had turned this boulevard



into one of the most prestigious areas in the city, a more expansive panorama. This long, tree-lined boulevard was formerly called Contrada delle Grazie, and then it was named Viale XX Settembre, and is today known as Viale dei Martiri, Martyr Boulevard. The name stems from the 31 partisans who were hung in Bassano, some of them from the trees that still overlook the Brenta Valley, on 26 September 1944. On 9 October 1946, the Prime Minister of the newly formed Italian Republic, Alcide De Gasperi, awarded the town of Bassano a gold medal for military valour and each year the city commemorates the mopping up and massacre which took place on Mount Grappa on 20-23 September 1944.

2

## Giardini Parolini

Described in a nineteenth century guide to the town as a "place of pleasure", it is the only botanic garden in the region outside the sphere of the universities. A pleasant, lush oasis situated in the historic centre of Bassano, designed by Alberto Parolini, a local nobleman who was particularly active in the cultural life of the town at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Parolini was greatly influenced by Giambattista Brocchi, but above all by his trip to London which, at the time, was the hub of naturalistic



activity, and from which originated the trend for landscape gardens. In 1829, Parolini boasted a cultivation of "3000 species of different plants"; in the last catalogue compiled by his daughter, Antonietta, 3200 different species were enumerated. In 1929, the gardens were handed over to the Bassano Town Council and even though its dimensions were reduced during the fifties when a part of it was used for the construction of various buildings, the council has always considered it one of the town's major cultural locations. Some of the most interesting species in the garden include: the popular Cedar of Lebanon, the *Pinus Parolinii*, named after Parolini who discovered the species in 1819 in Asia Minor, the *Platanus Orientalis* which reaches a height of roughly 30 metres, the *Taxus Baccata* also called the "tree of death", and the *Cercis Siliquastrum*, which according to popular tradition is the type of tree from which Judas Iscariot hanged himself, otherwise known as Judas' tree.

3

## Loggia dei podestà and Town Hall

Podestà is the name given during the later Middle Ages to a high official in many Italian cities. The relative loggia dates from the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the building that is now the Town Hall was built above and behind it. Construction began in 1405, and a few years later the decision was made to install a dial clock made by Mastro Corrado da Feltre, at a cost of 46 gold ducats. The clock, which was inaugurated on 2 February 1430, is considered symbolic of the secular passage of time in the civitas. The current clock



mechanism was made by Bartolomeo Ferracina in 1747, the engineer after whom one of the most interesting streets in the town, near the bridge, was named. The inside walls are frescoed with the 120 coat-of-arms of the earliest podestà of the Veneto region. A fire in 1682 destroyed several precious frescoes by Jacopo Dal Ponte, fortunately, however, a fresco depicting St Christopher, patron saint of wayfarers, by Francesco Bassano Il Vecchio, Jacopo's father, still adorns the southern wall. According to local tradition, if a pilgrim, passing by, glanced at the saint, he would be protected throughout the day.

4

## Museo Civico, former Convento di San Francesco

The civic museum of Bassano, is one of the oldest museums in the Veneto region. It was erected in 1828 from the bequest of the local naturalist, Giambattista Brocchi. It comprises an art gallery housing the most extensive collection of paintings by Jacopo Dal Ponte and various members of his family, as well as paintings by other famous artists such as Guariento and Magnasco; the Council's Historical Archives; the library which contains a collection of



prints by the Remondini family, famous eighteenth century engravers; an archaeological section with important finds in the Chini section; and the Canova section, with its collection of studies and pieces by Antonio Canova. The museum is located in the former convent of St Francis, the only original parts still remaining being the church and the cloister.

5

## Museo degli Alpini

The Italian Alpine Troops museum was established in 1948 upon the wave of enthusiasm stirred up by the inauguration of the reconstructed Ponte degli Alpini and the first national parade of the Penne Nere, after the Second World War (3 October 1948). The building, which is the property of the Montegrappa Section of the Italian Alpine Troops association, stands on the right bank of the Brenta river, next to the Ponte Vecchio, and has become the headquarters of the association, as well as a museum and tavern open to

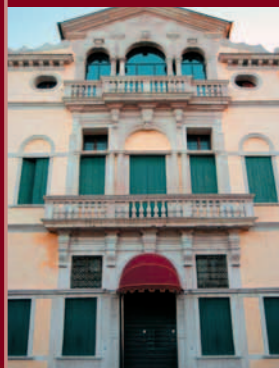


the public. The museum started off with very little: cuttings from old newspapers, a few war relics and pieces of the old bridge collected during its reconstruction. Over the years the collection has grown as enthusiastic volunteers gather relics from the two world wars and donations from association members and local citizens who have decided to put their historical souvenirs, often jealously guarded for years, on show for the general public. The first major renovation of the museum took place in the mid 1970's: access was improved, provisions were made to secure it against the flooding of the Brenta river and the precious coffer ceiling featuring hand painted insignias and mottos of the various troop units was restored. The latest innovation involves a realistic combat location, which has been set up on the bottom floor, and includes a howitzer belonging to the mountain artillery section. Some of the most interesting items include original photos of the Russian campaign, one of the leaflets air dropped on Vienna by Gabriele D'Annunzio, a flag of the House of Savoy with wound marks on it, old and new uniforms, the gold medal corner, a vast assortment of all kinds of arms and logistic material from the two world wars and the war of liberation.

6

## Palazzo Bonaguro

The palace is located in Borgo Angarano, which is in the western part of the town. The name of this suburb originates from the ancient "fundus Ancharianus", which up until 1812, was a separate municipality connected to nearby Bassano by the Ponte Vecchio. Construction on the palace began during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it was subsequently renovated towards the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century as can be seen from the balconies on the façade, the shape of the interior arcs and the openings in the upper section.



The interior walls of the palace are decorated with magnificent frescoes; the Banquet Scene, which is in the manner of Paolo Veronese, adorns the walls of the first room on the right. The palace is enhanced by the spacious park at the back and is now a preferred location for holding shows and exhibitions.

7

## Palazzo Pretorio

Via Matteotti, which extends from the castle to the Town Hall, was once the main thoroughfare called Contrada del Palazzo. From 1315 onwards the praetorian palace was the headquarters of the podestà and later became the headquarters of the Town Council. The palace is still surrounded by a wall section. Access to the palace is through a white stone ashlar archway, which features in its tympanum the lion of St Mark resting a paw on the open book of peace, the symbol of Bassano's allegiance to the Republic of Venice.



In 1722, the loggia from which the podestà administered justice once stood next to the entrance; it was replaced by a small church, dedicated to the patronage of the Virgin Mary, which is deconsecrated today. The stairway in the square dates from 1552, and halfway up, a small room displays the coat-of-arms of the families of the Venetian podestà. On the occasion of the "Ballata del Millenio", Millennium Ballade, the 1320 trial of the traitor Perenzano dei Blasi, which ends tragically with his being beheaded, is re-enacted in the palace courtyard.

8

## Palazzo Sturm and Museo della Ceramica

The Palazzo Sturm houses one of the most exhaustive ceramic collections in the area. The building, one of the most beautiful in Bassano, dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and overlooks the left bank of the Brenta river, just a few steps from the Ponte Vecchio; the terrace offers a magnificent view of the bridge. The building was originally the residence of the Ferrari family, known for their organzine silk factory; then it came into the possession of the Vanzo-Bonaguro family and finally of Baron G. B. Sturm who bequeathed it to the council to



be used as the ceramics museum. New additional sections are planned for future extensions to the museum. A small terrace and an elegant pronaos welcome the visitor. The palace spreads out over six floors, which descend along the slope of the riverbank. The arrangement of the rooms in the building is particularly whimsical and unpredictable as it follows the unevenness of the land on which it is built. The entrance hall was frescoed in 1765 by Giorgio Anselmi from Verona, with an imposing "Gigantomachy", and the next room with "Venus giving arms to Aeneas", mythological scenes which, at the time, were commonly depicted in the halls of the nobility. The museum houses collections of majolica ware, porcelain ware, earthen ware, all arranged chronologically: from medieval fragments of engraved ceramics to the famous Mainardi majolica ware, which in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century was produced in a factory located in the nearby street, Via Portici Lunghi, and to the contemporary section which boasts prestigious items as well as items by famous artists.

9

## Prato Santa Caterina and "Ragazzi del '99" Park

The spacious park located in the northern part of the town, and part of which is now being used as a car park, was originally used as a military training field. Fairs, which attracted people from all the outlying areas, were held here; and during epidemics the bodies of the dead were brought here. In fact, the church of St Rocco, patron saint of pestilence, was built here in 1631. The "Ragazzi del '99" Park was created on the eastern side, on the initiative of the national committee of ex-servicemen born in 1899.



The monument in the park includes a set of bronze bas-reliefs depicting 4 critical episodes in the history of the young soldiers, who in 1917 and 1918 were sent to halt the Austrian advance on the nearby Mount Grappa.

10

## Piazzotto Monte Vecchio and Monte di Pietà

Bassano's very first square was originally much more spacious than it is today. The most important public buildings gave onto it and today the town's ancient coat-of-arms can still be seen on the walls of the buildings. There was once a well in the middle of the square, which is why the square is often referred to, even today, as "Piazza del Pozzo", well square. Over the years it was also given the name "Piazza del Sale", salt square and then "Piazza degli Zoccoli", wooden clog square, as up until the mid-

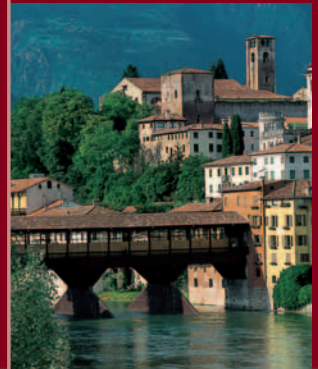


twentieth century pedlars used to come to the market held in this square to sell their 'sgalmare', a local type of wooden clogs. In 1264 a number of Jewish families settled in Bassano and the street branching off from the square was in fact known as Jew Street, Vicolo degli Zudei; the last money-lending transaction is recorded in archive documents as far back as 1492. The opening of a pawnshop coincided with a series of sermons delivered throughout the Veneto region, and in the local church of St Francis in June 1492, by Blessed Bernardino, the sin of usury worst enemy. The pawnshop was the first step towards solving the problem of usury and even today maintains its austerity.

11

## Ponte Vecchio

Over the years the Ponte Vecchio has become the symbol of the town. Known also as Ponte di Palladio or Ponte degli Alpini, this bridge has always been of fundamental importance to the local inhabitants. References to a bridge spanning the river at this point date back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, but the first definite mention is in 1209. In the past it was vitally important as a means of communication between the territories of Vicenza and Bassano (the boundary between the two territories was signalled at the



western end of the bridge and exercise-men controlled the traffic). Over the centuries the bridge was destroyed several times either during the various wars or by the sudden, violent flooding of the Brenta river, then always faithfully rebuilt to the original design by Palladio (1569): four trapezoidal breakwater piers supporting a floor system which is covered by a trussed roof. The bridge is constructed in wood to give it greater flexibility and to make it more resistant to the rapidly flowing waters of the river (only one stone bridge was ever erected, but it lasted less than six years). The rhythm of the pillars, the wood ribbing and the balustrades of the parapets modify the appearance and fascination of the bridge with every step and every passing hour of the day. The "Grapperia Nardini", one of the hundred historical inns of Italy, stands at the western end of the bridge, on the right. Whereas the tavern, Taverna Al Ponte, otherwise known as the Taverna degli Alpini, which houses the Italian Alpine Troops museum, stands at the eastern end. The view of the Valsugana valley from the bridge is quite spectacular.

12

## Porta delle Grazie

This is the north-eastern gateway into the town, referred to as either Porta Aureola or Porta delle Grazie, the gate of Graces. This gate, which was built as part of the 14<sup>th</sup> century walls surrounding the town, retains clearer evidence of the ancient nobility than the other gates. Two embedded columns support the large ashlar archway. The architrave, the frieze and the tympanum emphasise its classical inspiration. In 1561, a local architect, F. Zamberlan, one of Andrea Palladio's colleagues, was commissioned to design the gate by



a podestà from the Veneto region. Recent restorations have revitalised its past splendour. The area surrounding the gate is called Belvedere, because of the magnificent view of the Brenta Valley, with the Grappa massif on the right and the Asiago plateau on the left. In place of the present-day Caffè Italia there once stood the Belvedere Loggia, with its walls frescoed by Gerolamo, son of the famous Jacopo Dal Ponte. It was built in the 16th century by the podestà Priamo da Legge for the people of Bassano so that they could observe the military drills being carried out in the nearby Campomarzio (now called Prato Santa Catarina) as they strolled out beyond the walls. Caffè Italia can boast a host of famous patrons, such as George Sand who wrote the following in her diaries: "If you are ever passing through those areas, I highly recommend Bassano's Caffè alle Fosse, near the moat, which is one of the greatest things that a traveller can come across".

13

## Porta Diedo

This gate is near the lower castle known as the Berri Castle, built in 1315 by the Paduans to protect the new hamlets, which had sprung up outside the town walls. In 1389 the gate was incorporated into the wall built by Gian Galeazzo Visconti. The castle eventually fell into disrepair and was replaced by residential buildings. The only remaining structure is the gate, which was opened in 1541 by the podestà Domenico Diedo, to facilitate direct communication with



the increasing number of hamlets crowding the areas outside the town walls. The southern façade was frescoed in 1541 by Jacopo Dal Ponte but unfortunately few traces remain. Above the arch, a fresco depicted the ancient Roman hero Marco Curzio Rufo mounted on his rearing steed, in the act of hurling himself into the abyss, a paradigm of courage; above it, the mighty winged lion and the book of peace, the symbol of Bassano's allegiance to the Republic of Venice.

14

## Chiesa di San Donato

The church of St Donatus was erected in 1208 on the right bank of the Brenta river close to the Ponte Vecchio, by Ezzelino II, The Monk, upon the authorisation of the Bishop of Vicenza, Uberto II, in order to hinder the propagation of Cathar heresy. On 5 July 1221, Ezzelino summoned his two sons, Alberico and Ezzelino III to this church to divide up his possessions before retiring to Oliero. The church was later extended and turned into a Franciscan convent. According to Father F. Barbarano, the

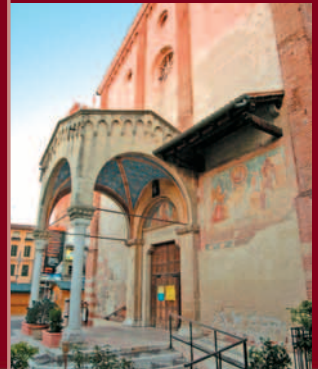


seventeenth century historian from Vicenza, St Francis of Assis and St Anthony of Padua both stayed here, in April 1221 and on 4 October 1226 respectively. In 1325 the Franciscans moved into the church of Holy Mary, subsequently called the church of St Francis, in the Square Piazza Garibaldi. Two years later the convent was handed over to the Benedictine Nuns who turned it into a hospital. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century it was returned to the Franciscans and from the mid-sixteenth century the building started to fall into a slow decay. Inside can be found a painting "Our Lady with Christ Child seated on a throne with St Donatus and St Michael the Archangel" by Francesco Dal Ponte Il Vecchio, Jacopo's father. In 1900 a long process of restructuring work took place to exalt the figures of St Francis and St Anthony by restoring the cell, which according to tradition was used by the two saints. Still today it offers the visitor an occasion for spiritual and religious meditation.

15

## Chiesa di San Francesco

The church of St Francis was built in honour of the Virgin Mary, during the period in which Bassano was ruled by the Ezzelini family, between 1158 and 1183. According to tradition Ezzelino II, The Stutterer, built the church to fulfil a vow after returning from the Holy Land. Piazza Garibaldi, the square which now occupies the space next to the church, was once part of the moat which encircled the town wall; like many churches of the time it was built near the town gates, to make access easier for pilgrims who



arrived after long, and often difficult and dangerous, journeys. Between 1287 and 1292 it was home to the Friars Minor Conventual who dedicated it to St Francis. It is a Romanesque-Gothic style building with gable façade, in the shape of a Latin cross; the slender prothyrum with its rounded arches dates from 1306, and in the lunette were frescoed in 1613 by Luca Martinelli Our Lady, Christ Child, St Anthony and St Francis. To the right of the prothyrum there is a fresco, completed in the early decades of the 15<sup>th</sup> century by Battista da Vicenza, of the Annunciation in the style of the valentinian heresy, depicting the Christ Child flying from the Holy Spirit towards Mary's breast. The single-nave church with transept is covered with trusses and the walls still show traces of fifteenth century frescoes. On the high altar there is a copy of Guariento's wooden crucifix, the original being preserved in the adjacent civic museum.

16

## Chiesa di San Giovanni Battista

The church of St John the Baptist stands on the southern side of Piazza Libertà, which was actually created when the moat around the second wall was filled in. It was commissioned by the Blasi family, built in 1308 and reconstructed during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the local architect Giovanni Miazzi, who designed it after his meeting with Francesco Maria Preti. The elderly inhabitants of the area refer to the church as 'buszia' (lie) because of the contrast between its imposing neoclassical

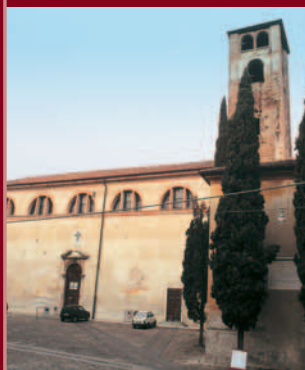


façade and the very small interior which is parallel to the façade, and has the high altar placed on the left side instead of to the front of the church. One reason for this unusual choice was the lack of space available to the architect. The small altarpiece depicting St John the Baptist is an interesting early work by Giambattista Piazzetta (1682-1754); the statues of the angels, the putti and the bas-reliefs are by Orazio Marinali (the street along the left side of the church is named after him). In front of the church, on the opposite side of the square, stand the buildings which once housed the workshop of the Remondini family, who brought Bassano worldwide renown through their prints.

17

## Duomo di Santa Maria in Colle

The Cathedral of Holy Mary on the Hill, the town's cathedral, stands within the first wall and inside the upper castle. This is the highest part of the town, where the original settlement was established and around which proliferated the typical small hamlets. On the right, before stepping through the gate that leads into the castle's courtyard, stands the Ser Ivano Tower, named after the head of the Ezzelini family troops, a watchtower, situated diagonally with respect to the position of the walls. This parish church is mentioned in a



decree dating from 998, which was drawn up during a judicial assembly chaired by Count Azeli and Oberto, Bishop of Verona. In 1998 the town of Bassano inaugurated the "Ballata del Millennio", Millennium Ballade, an event to be held biennially in September, to celebrate this occasion through a series of theatrical performances held in significant locations throughout the historic centre. Over the centuries the parish church of the Holy Mary on the Hill was modified and extended until it achieved its present-day appearance, with its obvious Baroque influence. The interior is rectangular in design, with Corinthian pilasters lining its walls at regular intervals. The high altar altarpiece was created by Leandro Dal Ponte, son of the famous Jacopo, in 1595; the same artist painted the "Lapidation of St Stephen" on the second altar to the right.

The sculptures are by Orazio Marinali, completed around 1704. The magnificent organ was made by Francesco Antonio di Giacomo Dacci in 1796.

The ceiling is decorated with three paintings by G. B. Volpato, the famous local artist (1633-1706), one of which depicts St Bassiano, the town patron.

18

## Teatro Astra

Once a council theatre, and now a cinema, the Astra Theatre is the most prominent edifice in the long row of buildings overlooking Viale dei Martiri. The ancient neoclassical façade remains intact, with its deep three-arched entrance loggia. It was designed by the local architect Giacomo Bauto and inaugurated in 1811. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century theatrical performances were held in a hall in the praetorian palace and reserved strictly for the podestà and nobility. It wasn't until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that the need arose



to create a new space accessible to everyone. The theatre's popularity grew also thanks to the rich musical seasons held here. In 1949 the engineer Bonfanti designed the theatre's conversion to a cinema. The Muses on the proscenium were painted by one of the major contemporary local artists, Danilo Andreose.

19

## Tempio Ossario

The first mention of the ossuary is found in a circular issued on 1 July 1861 in which the parishioners are asked to donate funds for the construction of a church, which would become the centre of the town's religious life. Monsignor Gobbi was the motivator behind the project and the first stone was blessed on 13 September 1908. During the First World War many soldiers were temporarily buried in the various cemeteries around the foothills of Mount Grappa, but there was a need to find a permanent and



dignified final resting place for those soldiers. The church was chosen to fulfil this purpose and was subsequently turned into an ossuary. The exterior of the building is in the Gothic-Venetian style with a Romanesque influence; the massive structure rises up from eight Pove stone steps; it is surmounted by the severe octagonal base of the cupola, streamlined by two slender 60 metre high bell towers. The interior is a Latin cross shape measuring 75 m in length with a nave and two aisles separated by 10 marble columns. Roughly 6,000 soldiers (236 of whom were decorated) are buried here. On 8 February 1945, a number of bombs exploded in front of the façade uncovering many of the burial niches; photos of these dreadful scenes still remain. In August 1936, General Gaetano Giardino, whose monument stands at the beginning of Viale delle Fosse facing Mount Grappa, was interred here in accordance with his wishes to be buried "amongst my men" as he clearly stated in writing.

20

## Torre Civica

Also called Torre Grande or Torre della Piazza, the civic tower, is located in Piazza Garibaldi, opposite the church of St Francis. It is mentioned for the first time in a document dating from 1349. Before this date there are only a series of hypotheses, but it is commonly believed to have been erected at the same time as the second wall in 1312, in order to protect the new dwellings, which had sprung up around the old village. Its original purpose is also shrouded in mystery: its imposing dimensions and the lack



of decorative embellishments (the clock dates from 1746 and the decorative work from 1823) seem to indicate that it was used for military purposes, however, from 1349 it was mainly used for civil purposes. It was probably erected by the Paduans around 1315, midway between the two castles as a strategic point for the defence of the new and old access points to the town. The tower has a pyramidal trunk, 40 metres high and 14 metres wide; it is higher than the church of St Francis complex and consequently a perfect control point. The tower was recently restored and it is now possible to climb to the top and enjoy a magnificent view of Bassano. Along the climb to the top, the history of the tower and the town are narrated through a series of illustrative panels and photos.

21

## Chiesa della Santissima Trinità

The church of the Holy Trinity, founded by members of the Order of the Holy Trinity at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, was most probably put up next to a hospital or poorhouse for wayfarers and the sick. The façade was designed by Giovanni Miazzi (1698-1797) with an obvious neopalladian influence: four semicolumns, resting on huge bases, support an entablature topped by a classical triangular tympanum, decorated with a denticulate cornice. Above this can be seen the three theological virtues: Faith, Hope and



Charity. One of the masterpieces of sixteenth-century art, Jacopo Bassano's Holy Trinity (1546-47), is found in this church; at the time, the artist was paid for his artwork partly with money, and partly in kind (wheat and sulphur). Typical of his style, an essential component of the painting is the landscape, the classic view of Bassano enlivened by scenes of everyday life, with its towers in the distance and with the Grappa massif in the background. The artist placed the episode of St Augustine and Christ Child, taken from The Golden Legend, in the middle of the Brenta river, surrounded by sailing boats.

22

## Convento di San Sebastiano

The convent of St Sebastian is situated in one of the oldest hamlets on the left bank of the Brenta river. Ancient Roman finds date back to the "fundus Margnanus". Just below the parish church of Holy Mary on the Hill there are still traces of the Porta Margnana, Margnana Gate. The area included a ford for crossing the Brenta river. The current convent complex began as a country church dedicated to St Pancras. In the 1480's the Augustinian Nuns dedicated the renovated and enlarged complex to St Sebastian,



the patron saint associated with the plague. Some frescoes from the 15<sup>th</sup> century remain, including, in the confessional area, the Eternal Father holding his Son's cross; the bottom part shows obvious signs of wear as for years visitors have rubbed their hands on it before making the sign of the cross. As a result of the Napoleonic suppressions the convent was closed in 1810, then in 1823 it was given in perpetual usufruct to the Capuchin Monks. The monks are still present and very active in the life of the town, and they continue to make the convent one of the main spiritual religious centres of Bassano. By appointment, tourists can visit the large collection of apothecary's pots and a collection of archaeological relics discovered by the monks within the convent area.

23

## Monastery of Campese

The monastery was founded by the famous Cluniac abbot, Ponzio, in 1128. Upon returning from the Holy Land and in a moment of deep reflection, he decided to set up a small monastery on the right bank of the Brenta river together with a group of monks and under the protection of the Da Romano family, to rediscover those values which seemed to be slowly disappearing from his beloved Congregation of Cluny. The most remarkable parodic and realistic macaronic poet Teofilo Folengo, better known as Merlin



Cocai (1492-1544), well known for his brazen, light-hearted and burlesque poetry, retired here in 1543. He is buried in the chapel to the right of the high altar. The fame of Campese, picturesque hamlet at the entrance of the Valsugana, is particularly linked to his presence here. The beauty and wholesomeness of the location turned the convent into a haven of peace for the religious in search of a retreat; on the other hand its secludedness, especially during the period of the Lutheran schism, transformed it into a place of internment for monks suspected of having unorthodox sympathies.



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## Grapperia Nardini

Since 1779 the Grapperia Nardini is located at the entrance of the Ponte Vecchio (Old Bridge) and it means History and Tradition. Inside, since then nothing has changed and time seems to stop, showing that for the Nardini Family memory is very important.

### LE BOLLE DI NARDINI

To celebrate 225 years of activity, the Nardini Family addressed itself to the Lithuanian-origin architect Massimiliano Fuksas to create a new auditorium and space for research.



For this structure, the architect imagined two elliptic glass spaces. The structures, called "Bolles" (bubbles), represent two alembics softly floating in the air. The "Bolles" are supported and joined by one diagonal steel structure and white "paws" which seem to sink into a water veil hiding the auditorium underground.

It was a bet to insert such an architectural project into a medieval town contest; at the time we can surely assert to have succeeded in matching future forms and landscape of a strong historical identity. Looking at the "Bolles" is always astonishing, their forms and light are every time exciting.

*The Nardini's "Bolles" are situated 3 km from Bassano del Grappa historical centre, direction Padua, after the hospital, on the right side.*

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## The Poli Grappa Museum

In 1898 GioBatta Poli, who produced straw hats, decided to follow his greatest passion: grappa.

So, in that year he built a small still, put it up on a small cart and, going door to door through the village, started to distil grape pomaces. From this year on, Family Poli dedicates its life to distillates.

In 1993 the idea of a Grappa Museum came out, strongly wanted by Jacopo Poli, set up inside a '400 noble palace in front of the famous wooden bridge "Ponte Vecchio". In a small but suggestive area, inside



the Museum it is possible to follow an interesting educational tour in two rooms: in the first you discover the distillation origin with documents and instruments, in the second, thanks to copper stills and illustrations, you can feel the real distillation process atmosphere, and the reasons why it is considered an antique and modern art at the same time.

That is possible because the museum provides specific multimedial equipment which creates a friendly atmosphere full of history and elegance. In addition to the museum, it is possible to visit also the Poli distillery, located in Schiavon, 12 km from Bassano direction Vicenza.

## MAROSTICA

A medieval town dating from the Scaliger period (14<sup>th</sup> century); the original town wall with its merlons and towers still climbs the hill from the lower castle to the upper castle, from where you have an impressive panorama. Marostica is otherwise known as the "Chess Town" because of its Chessboard Square set out right in front of the lower castle. According to legend two young noblemen, Rinaldo d'Angarano and Vieri da Vallonara, were both in love with the beautiful Lionora, daughter of Taddeo Parisio, Lord of Marostica



Castle. The Lord forbade the two suitors to fight a duel, but ordered them to 'fight it out' in a game of chess; the winner would wed the fair Lionora but the loser would also join the family by marrying her younger sister, Oldrada. The event is re-enacted on the huge Chessboard in the square every two years (even years) and attracts thousands of visitors from all around the world. The lavish period costumes, the colourful parades, the multicoloured gonfalons are all reproduced exactly as they were at the time of the original chess game, and the chess moves are still announced in the ancient language of the Republic of Venice. Over 550 people take part in the event and the game lasts roughly 2 hours.

Marostica is also renowned for its cherries and its Spring festival held to celebrate its most famous product.

## THE HILLS OF BASSANO

Bassano is situated at the foot of Mount Grappa, but it is surrounded by colourful and poetic hills, perfect for long walks along the endless mule tracks and for carefree days in the midst of nature. In recent years locations providing refreshment and overnight accommodation have proliferated in these hills and have consequently made the area even more accessible to visitors who wish to enjoy the peace and beauty of nature. Jacopo Dal Ponte loved to wander around these hills; he absorbed the colours and the



atmosphere and the views from the hills, and expressed them in the landscapes of his paintings. Ancient hamlets and churches enveloped in silence, aristocratic villas and warm taverns give the visitor an understanding of the history and culture of the people of Bassano, who love to maintain the genuineness and hospitality which have always been their distinguishing characteristics. As well as their famous cherries, the hills of Bassano are also gaining respect for their oil and wine production thanks to the enthusiasm and professionalism of a few devoted producers.

# WELCOME TO BASSANO DEL GRAPPA

## MOUNT GRAPPA

"Mount Grappa you are my homeland ..." says the famous refrain of an Alpini song. And the people of Bassano still become emotional every time they hear these words. Grappa is a massif situated between the Brenta and the Piave rivers, with its peak reaching a height of 1775 m. The main road starts at Romano d'Ezzelino, just a few kilometres from the centre of Bassano, and is called Cadorna Highway in memory of General Francesco Cadorna who built it in 1916-17. The Victor Emmanuel III tunnel bears witness to



the heroism of these lands – it penetrates beneath the peak for almost one and a half kilometres, before joining a five-kilometre stretch with a series of secondary branch offs. The Military Memorial stands on the peak (12,615 Italian fallen soldiers, 10,322 of whom are unknown), surmounted by General Giardino's tomb and the chapel of Our Lady of Mount Grappa, consecrated in 1901 by the Patriarch of Venice, Giuseppe Sarto, the future St Pius X. For the great and courageous feats carried out on this mountain, the entire area above 1700 m has been declared a national monument and sacred zone.

## VALSUGANA

The Brenta river winds its way along this valley, which is full of surprise, a wealth of picturesque views and fascinating landscapes, of ancient legends and age-old traditions. It offers endless opportunities for entertainment. Studded with towns steeped in history, such as Pove, Campolongo, Oliero, Valstagna, San Nazario, Cison del Grappa, Solagna, each of which has its own particular attractions. Attractions ranging from sports, such as canoeing on the rapids of the Brenta, to the religious, such as the quinquennial biblical



procession which has been re-enacted through the streets of Pove since medieval times; from the artistic, contained in the Stonemason Museum in Pove, to the historical, such as the Brenta Canal Museum in Valstagna or the Carpané Tobacco Museum in San Nazario. The park and the caves of Oliero are fascinating, as are Covolo del Butistone and the Calà del Sasso, a terrace built in the 15<sup>th</sup> century with 4,444 steps leading from Valstagna to the Asiago Plateau.

## CERAMICS

Bassano and nearby Nove became famous throughout Europe for their prestigious production of ceramics in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Thanks to the local clay and white earth deposits, the Brenta river, which drove the mills used for crushing the quartz and calcium carbonate, the great spirit of enterprise which already distinguished the inhabitants of the area, some of the biggest names in the ceramics world, such as Manardi and Antonibon, moved into the area. The light majolica ware with its white milky glaze,



produced by Manardi, is particularly well known. The history of ceramics in the area is expertly portrayed by two extensive collections, one housed in Palazzo Sturm in Bassano, and the other in the Civic Museum of Ceramics, in Nove. The production of ceramics is still a thriving activity and is now protected by a quality label; there are currently over 400 workshops employing almost 3,000 workers, including entrepreneurs and artists-handicraftsmen, whose imagination and skill remain a fascinating experience for the onlooker.

## BASSANO'S ASPARAGUS

The symbols of the town of Bassano are the bridge, grappa, ceramics and its highly regarded white turion. Cultivation of the asparagus in Bassano began back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and today it is known throughout the world for its distinguishing features: its milky white colouring, its straight fat stalk and the absence of stringy fibres. The vegetable was selected and developed over time, aided by the ideal climate of the area. During the asparagus season, which runs from April through May, a number of events take place in the town and its



surrounding areas including festivals and gourmet exhibitions, and a competition for the most beautiful bunch of asparagus, which is judged during the festivities held in the town centre. The words of Emanuele Zuccato, the pharmacist from Vicenza, set down in the local dialect express the importance of the asparagus for the people of Bassano: "Bassano is famous for its bridge, for ceramics grappa and Mount Grappa, and for the glory given to it by the Dal Ponte family. But another glory (you'll be sorry if you miss out!) is its asparagus: the best in the world! And when they're served, with hard boiled eggs arranged like a crown around them in a soup plate, they turn a poor man into a rich man".

## GRAPPA

An ancient proverb says: "Grappa is lead in the morning, silver at noon, gold in the evening". Grappa was once produced by local farmers and used for medicinal purposes and as a disinfectant. Even though, at some point in time, the Veneto Republic instituted an obligatory distillers' licence, illegal production continued and over the centuries the distillation process became so refined that it eventually yielded a product that has become world-famous. The product is so well known that often tourists visiting



Bassano del Grappa assume that the name of the town actually derives from the name of the spirit. The most famous 'grapperia' (grappa tasting bars) are clustered around the Ponte Vecchio, whereas the distilleries are located on the outside of town. Two of the most interesting grappa-related attractions include the Grapperia Nardini, which is listed as one of the hundred historical inns of Italy, and Grapperia Poli's grappa museum, which offers a fascinating voyage through the world and aromas of grappa.

See points 24 and 25.

## ITINERARY J. DAL PONTE

Next to Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese, among the great names in sixteenth-century art, shines the name of Jacopo Dal Ponte, one of the most humane and complex artists in the history of that art period. Son of a minor artist, Francesco Bassano II Vecchio, Jacopo (approx. 1510 - 1592) studied in Venice but soon found that his homeland was the true inspiration for his art. His art conveys his love of nature, his sensitivity towards every-day life, of which he manages to capture the most poetic and fascinating aspects;



his art is concerned with the subtle play of light and colour yet at the same time expresses simply the most complex religious mysteries. Dal Ponte's greatness and the development of his art over the years can be experienced through the vast collection of his works housed in the civic museum. For a more complete overview of his art many examples can be viewed in places other than the museum, such as in the Church of the Holy Trinity in Bassano, the Church of St Anthony in Marostica, the parish churches in Cassola, Mussolente, Pove, Borso, the frescoes in the church of Cartigliano, in Lusiana and in Enego, on the Asiago Plateau.

## THE VILLAS

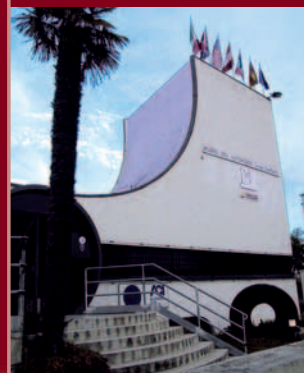
The Bassano territory abounds in examples of villas. Villa Bianchi-Michiel (can only be visited externally) is located on Campesana Highway, the road that stretches from the Ponte Vecchio to Campese, on the right bank of the Brenta river. The villa was constructed on the will of Giacomo Angarano in 1548 from the design by A. Palladio, but he only managed to complete the barns. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Venetian Domenico Margutti completed the central structure for the Gradenigo family, but with a different design. The end result is a villa which



is both heterogeneous yet harmonious and the park at the back helps maintain the villa's charming atmosphere of seclusion. Fields surround the villa, just as Giacomo Angarano desired and which was a common characteristic of the noble residences of the Veneto region. Arriving from Padua, before actually entering the town, you find the Villa Rezzonico-Borella on the left, which was built between 1691 and 1713 by an unknown architect who was surely greatly influenced by the architectonic conceptions of Baldassarre Longhena. The four towers and the oratory of St John the Baptist belong to another great Venetian architect, Giorgio Massari, who worked on the buildings from 1733 onwards. The painting "Jupiter striking the Titans with lightning" by Giambattista Volpato can be found here as well as four large symbolic paintings, including Antonio Canova's embodiment of Faith on the ground floor; Canova was a frequent visitor to the villa and an admirer of the ornate stuccoes, which adorned the interior of the villa. Other interesting villas in the area include Villa Morosini Cappello in Cartigliano, Villa Negri Piovone in Mussolente, Villa Cornaro in Romano d'Ezzelino, Villa Comello in Rossano, and Villa Dolfin Boldù in Rosà.

## CAR MUSEUM

The Car Museum "Bonfanti-VIMAR" was founded in 1991 by a small group of members of the famous "Circolo Veneto Automoto d'Epoca". This club, set up in Bassano in 1961, today is the second oldest one in Italy. It is the only European museum which organizes thematic exhibitions every six months. As a matter of fact, in spring and autumn they propose new and stimulating themes, regarding various aspects such as tech, sport, society. The Car Museum "Bonfanti-VIMAR" imposes itself for its dynamism and



for its style, not limited to the innovative exhibitions, but open to events and debates, so becoming a meeting point for sector personalities.

*The museum is located 5 km from Bassano del Grappa, direction Treviso, in Romano d'Ezzelino.*

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WELCOME TO BASSANO DEL GRAPPA



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