ITALY

RESTFUL IN Trieste

The world's largest seaside square, one of the most famous cappuccinos, several dramatically scenic spots, these make a trip to this eastern edge of Italy more than worth your while. **BY ROD ABSON**

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THE EDGE OF the sky was turning a dusty orange as we walked slowly through the pre-dawn calm. The port of Trieste was waking up, and so were we, as the salty breeze whispered gently to us. My wife and I were out early, for a day of discovery in the city of Trieste, nestled on the far eastern edge of Italy.

We strolled along the footpaths that separate sea and shore and I imagined the other people who had walked in this same place. I pictured early fishermen setting out to capture some of the sea's bounty, returning to small village markets. We walked a little further and I imagined the mythological tales of Jason and the Argonauts landing here in search of the Golden Fleece. As the sky lightened, I saw Roman ships establishing a mighty sea port, buildings and trade linked throughout the Roman empire. Further still, the invasions and overthrown empires of barbarians, Goths, and the French. Then as the sky came to open it's bright blue eye, I pictured the stability of life under the Hapsburg Monarchy, which ruled these lands for over 500 years. It was during this time, the Piazza dell'Unità came to life, the world's largest seaside square, which stood before us.

We cut a line across the grey stone square, boxed in by ornate 19th-century cream buildings that seemed to belong to a different time. At the corner we entered the *Caffè degli Specchi*, the aroma of coffee and pastries telling us it was time for breakfast. From a selection of 100 types of coffee, we ordered the famous Cappuccino Grande, some fresh pastries and brioches, a kind of buttery bread. As we sat at the polished wooden tables, the room seemed even bigger through the mirrored walls, 'specchi' meaning mirror in Italian. I pictured the writers who used to gather at this cafe and try to absorb inspiration with the hit of caffeine.

With our stomachs content, we continued our exploration through the narrow shopping streets, now crowding with people watching each other, that fantastic European pastime, as much as the goods on sale. Another interesting historical remnant of Trieste's waves of immigration are in the diversity of religious monuments to explore. I found the quiet spaces of Chiesa di San Giusto (the Trieste Cathedral), for instance, to be particularly peaceful. With multiple churches, temples

HOTDEAL

WEEKEND OFFER

Weekend at Victoria Hotel for two in Junior Suite at €180. Includes breakfast, champagne, and a castle visit. Visit www.hotelvictoriatrieste.com

The picture-perfect expanse of Trieste

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BARCOLANA REGATTA

For sailing enthusiasts, the Barcolana Regatta held in the Adriatic Sea launches at Trieste. This is the world's biggest sailing race with over 2,000 participants competing from local yacht clubs through to international competitors in maxi yachts. Held every second Sunday in October since 1969, it has grown to be a popular event for sailors and spectators alike, so book your holiday hotel early. Visit www.barcolana.it for more information.

and even a synagogue, we could have spent all day discovering this side of Trieste.

After all of the walking it was time to take a seat and experience the transport that locals have used for over 100 years. From the Piazza Oberdan in the centre of town we boarded the 'Tram de Opcina' and settled down on the wooden bench seats. The electric tram winds its way slowly through town, climbing up the mountain side to the Carso Plateau. We jumped out at the Obelisco stop and walked along a shaded winding path. From here we could see the view overlooking all of Trieste, further to Slovenia and Croatia on the far edges, like fingers reaching into the Adriatic Sea.

We caught up with the tram on its return and ventured back into Trieste to meet up with a couple of friends who lived nearby. We needed a quick bite to eat for lunch and found a pizza shop displaying a wide selection. We picked up a few slices with fresh tomato paste, oregano, mozzarella cheese and prosciutto ham—*buon appetito!* With a couple of drinks we sat in the park and caught up on the morning's explorations. There were still more Trieste discoveries to be found, helped by some local knowledge.

We drove out along the coast to the Castello di Miramare, a white castle perched atop a cliff on the edge of the ocean. Here, we admired the ornate gardens and antique furniture of Maximilian of Haspburg who ordered the building of the castle in 1856. Having been fully overwhelmed by the opulence of Maximilian's material wealth, we headed out to see some of the natural wealth of the province.

Trieste city is embraced by vineyards that stretch throughout the surrounding Trieste province and into neighbouring Slovenia. We drove away from the city and within half an hour, the traffic had dispersed, replaced by rows of neatly planted vineyards contoured over the land. We pulled into the Villa Russiz winery and met one of the winery staff who shook our hands with the grip of a bear. We were shown the large stainless steel fermenting vats where the wine is kept for at least eight months after being harvested. A most intricate and high-tech operation. We were then guided down into a cellar with curved arches and thick creamy walls. Here wooden barrels of wine slept silently in neat rows. The history of the vineyard was explained to us as it dated back to 1869, when the region was discovered to have a perfect blend of climate and soil to harvest a rich wine crop. The tradition has been tailored

1. Chiesa di San Giusto, the Trieste Cathedral 2. Walking around the laidback town is the best way to discover it 3. Discover the process of wine making at the Villa Russiz winery 4. Piazza dell'Unità, the world's largest seaside square 5. The scenic Castello di Miramare

ever since to meet the advancement in technology, yet it was obvious that some things were ageless. At the heart of the whole production was the humble grape and it was time to pay our respects.

We wandered outside into the late afternoon sun and up a beautiful narrow stone path lined with cyprus trees. Each vine spread across the landscape was heavy with burgundy grapes, waiting for exactly the right moment to be harvested and take on the new life process of becoming a rich flavoured wine. At the top of the stone path stood a small red-bricked church with a green dome, completing the pretty picture.

We climbed the last stairs to the top of the hill, then turned back to look over the rolling landscape. Terracotta tiled houses dotted the landscape amidst waves of vines. We opened a bottle of Friulano wine poured the bright straw yellow wine into the glasses. As the blue sky returned to the dusky orange, and the sun disappeared over the horizon, we made a short toast. To Trieste.

AT A GLANCE

GETTING THERE
Delhi-Milan on Jet Airways. Fare: ₹40,000 (approx). The train to Trieste takes around five hours, with trains every 1-2 hours, costing ₹3,700 1st class; check www.trenitalia.com

WHEN TO GO
Autumn (September to December) and Spring (March to June) are the best seasons for visiting this region.

MUST DO

STAY
Victoria Hotel, Lovely hotel within 10 minute walk from the main square. Cost: €140 including breakfast. Visit www.hotelvictoriatrieste.com
Affordable: Residence San Giusto, Montague Street, 8-34137 Trieste. Cost: Starting €425 for a week. Tel: +39 040 762661; e-mail: info@residencesangiusto.it

EAT
Caffè degli Specchi is one of the most popular cafe restaurants in Trieste, famous for it's cappuccino grande.

SHOP
An antiques and flea market is held the third Sunday of each month at Cittavechhia, near the Piazza dell'Unità. Trieste is also well known for its ground coffee beans.

SEE
Miramare Castle. Built from 1856 to 1860, this castle by the lake will have you dreaming of being part of a royal family.

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ROD ABSON

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEFANO DEIURI