

into the public eye, it was a fashionable destination for European royalty, owing to its mild climate and therapeutic spa waters, as well as to its busy social calendar of parties and entertainment. Today, Merano has maintained its historical reputation as a health-giving place and a haunt of the jet-set, and offers a whole range of musical programmes, concerts and art exhibitions. But although it has kept one foot in the past, the town is also looking to the future, and has developed grand programmes, as **Uta Radakovich of Alto Adige Marketing**, which promotes the region, confirms. "In 2005 the thermal baths will reopen after two years of renovations. They were built in the 1970s, and needed modernising, so the company that owns them decided to invest in giving them a wholesale revamp. In addition, **a new 5-star hotel, the Kurhotel, is to be built nearby**, right on the river Passirio. Details have not been revealed yet, but we do know that it will contain a conference suite". So the number of facilities is on the up then, and is adding to those already present, such as the **Kurhaus** conference centre, which can accommodate up to a thousand people and has for several years been the region's main business events venue. Merano's many hotels include the **Grand Hotel Palace**, boasting spacious rooms, magnificent public areas and a sophisticated atmosphere, as well as a beauty farm. Nearby is the **Park Hotel Mignon**, set in its own grounds, which has a heated swimming pool and a health and fitness centre. Its guestrooms were recently extended and renovated. Just outside the centre of town, in an area of villas and castles, is the sumptuous **Castel Rundegg**,

which dates back to the 13th century. In 1982 it opened Italy's first hotel beauty farm, which even today is still frequented by many famous Italian and international names.

Down in the valleys

From Bolzano and Merano it's just a short distance to South Tyrol's most breathtaking valleys. The region is officially divided into seven tourist areas: Val Venosta, Merano and around, Bolzano and around, Southern South Tyrol, Valle Isarco, Valli di Tures and Aurina e Dolomiti (www.suedtirol.info), which are managed and promoted by 12 consortia.

But there are many more than seven valleys: in fact there are more than thirty, large and small, whose natural attractions are a magnet for visitors. The area has eight parks (one of which, Stelvio, is a national park), four lakes suitable for swimming, and more than 200 crystal-clear Alpine pools. Sports include skiing of course: there are more than 1,000 km of slopes, and 1,800 km of cross-country routes. But the region also has 25 riding stables and 5 golf courses (one 18-hole and the rest 9-hole), as well as surfing,

sailing and paragliding facilities. And naturally, there is a whole network of trails for hiking fans.

Let's look now at valley areas that have venues of interest to the business market. From Bolzano the A22 motorway leads towards the Brenner Pass, which crosses from Italy to Austria. Our destination is **Bressanone**, in Valle Isarco, surrounded by vineyards stretching right up over the mountain slopes. The little town preserves many of the influences of its past as an ecclesiastical principality, as well as a Teutonic atmosphere, with monuments and buildings in Romanesque and Baroque style. The modern **Forum Bressanone** in the town centre is a conference venue with large, multi-functional rooms and panoramic views over the surrounding peaks.



700 INCENTIVE OPPORTUNITIES

History has left many traces in the South Tyrol, which has one of the highest concentrations of castles and stately homes in Europe. There are 700, of which 190 are castles, 297 the homes of noble families, 64 ruins and 150 fortified complexes. Many of them are well-preserved, thanks to funding from the regional government or to the efforts of the descendants of the families who built them, and are open to the public, or have been turned into museums, restaurants or charming hotels (www.suedtirol-marketing.info). Many castles are also suitable for events, whether meetings or regal-style gala dinners. Here is just a selection.

Castel Mareccio This ancient castle is in the immediate vicinity of Bolzano's historic old town, and its origins date back to 1194. Following a year of renovations which were completed in April, the central courtyard is now covered by an attractive glass arch.

Castel Roncolo Some 25 km from Bolzano, the 14th-century Castel Roncolo looms atop a rocky spur. Inside, its rooms contain splendid frescoes showing scenes of courtly life, as well as the adventures of King Arthur and the knights of the round table. These are the biggest and best preserved non-religious medieval frescoes in Italy.

Castello Katzenzungen Between Bolzano and Merano, this is a typical Renaissance-style castle, with elegant rooms and wood-panelled walls. Next to the front door is Europe's oldest grapevine, which is about 600 years old and covers 350 sqm.

Castello Pienzena In the quiet residential area of Maia Alta in Merano, the majestic Castel Pienzenau is set in its own, well-established grounds, with the mountains as a backdrop.



From Bressanone take the SS49 road, which leads to the border with south-west Austria. This passes firstly through Val Pusteria, and then to the final strip of Italian soil, Alta (or 'upper') Val Pusteria, an area of rocky cliffs, snow-capped peaks, little churches, convents and magnificent houses, many of which are frescoed. It's an excellent backdrop for events, and is being promoted as such by **Giorgio Cirimbelli**, head of the agency **Highstyle**, which specialises in organising medical congresses. "In March, the Eurac centre in Bolzano held a congress on video surgery, which was attended by 300 delegates", says Mr Cirimbelli. "As an extracurricular activity we organised a skiing session in Alta Val Pusteria, in which almost all the delegates participated enthusiastically. But this is just one example. There are plenty of other activities, including dog sledding, paragliding with instructors, and even hot air balloon trips, which give stunning views across the region". Also in Alta Val Pusteria is **Dobbiaco**, a mecca for cross-country skiers, even in summer. Nearby is Lake Dobbiaco, as well as the unpolluted Lake

Braies, 1,500 metres above sea level, located in the Fanes-Sennes-Braies nature reserve. For conferences there is the **Centro Culturale Grand Hotel**

Dobbiaco (which despite its name is not a hotel), in the heart of the town. The building is in typical South Tyrolean style, and is surrounded by the Three Peaks of Lavaredo, looming 3,000 metres into the sky.

To blow the cobwebs away from mind and body, take a trip to Sesto, the ideal starting point for excursions

to the surrounding countryside for skiing or horse-riding among the larch forests scattered across the mountain slopes. Here the destination of choice is the **Sport & Kurhotel Bad Moos**, an elegant and sophisticated hotel containing its own health and beauty centre and two conference rooms. It is located not far from the Croda Rossa cableway, which takes passengers up to 2,000 metres above sea level, giving breathtaking views over the countryside.