

Trieste's Gran Canale.  
Inset: the historic Caffè  
San Marco.



*Since the first café opened in 1748, the blend of migrants, coffee, culture and commerce has intensified.*

### MARITIME MIGHT

In the oceanic-sized Piazza Unità d'Italia – Europe's largest sea-facing piazza – among the flotilla of café chairs and newspaper readers outside the grand colonnade-swept Caffè degli Specchi, you might easily imagine yourself in Vienna. Coffee here comes as in the Austrian capital, served on a little silver tray with a bird's bath glass of water and slice of Viennese Sachertorte or layered Hungarian Dobos Torte.

Trieste's fortunes rest with the sea and its strength as a commercial trading port, thanks to a deep water port which allows large ships to dock right inside the city, and its privileged centuries-old status as a 'Free Port' unhindered by protectionist rules on imports and exports, customs and taxes.

The Palazzo Stratti is a capsule of that history; its original owner was a Greek merchant who during tough times turned it over to Italy's largest insurance company, Trieste-based Assicurazioni Generali. Like its neighbours, the Palazzo del Lloyd Triestino, former headquarters of Italy's oldest shipping company, and the government palace, Palazzo della Luogotenenza, it grew fat on sea traffic.

Since the 18th century, coffee imports have underpinned Trieste's commercial riches, surpassing Venice as a Mediterranean traffic hub, as it welcomed coffee-laden ships from Ottoman ports and Egypt.

### TRADITIONAL ROASTERS

Since the first café opened in 1748, the blend of migrants, coffee, culture and commerce has intensified. While mayor from 1993 and 2001, Riccardo Illy remade the city while fostering the family coffee business founded by his Hungarian grandfather in 1933.

Strolling narrow streets and canals, you will encounter dozens of cafés and their iconic homegrown brands. From Illy and Hausbrandt, established in 1892 with its little yellow and red swilling mocha pot man, to Segafredo Zanetti (managers of Caffè degli Specchi since 2012) and lesser known Primo Aroma and Planet Coffee, some 50 companies participate in percolating Trieste's coffee fame.

Even if you are spared the wrath of the legendary bora winds that whip across the Gulf of Trieste, you still risk being swept off your feet by the dazzling seascapes, feisty maritime character, succulent seafood and espresso power of one of Italy's Adriatic gems.

Nestled in the foothills of the shimmering white limestone Karst plateau, over the blue expanse of the northern Adriatic, Trieste's history of independence helps it avoid being completely obscured by its more famous neighbour, Venice. Drive down the fortified ocean strip, towards the 15th-century Castello di San Giusto and you will feel how geography has underscored the city's stand-alone character. Jan Morris, in her 2001 memoir, *Trieste and the Meaning of Nowhere* called it a "hallucinatory city", full of "sweet melancholy".

In architecture and culture – even in its spirited coffee roasting tradition and flavour – Trieste still appears closer in spirit to Mitteleuropa (Central Europe) than the rest of Italy. To the east is the Istria Peninsula, home to both Slovenia and Croatia, and to the north, Austria. The capital of Italy's Friuli Venezia Giulia region was once one of the most powerful ports of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, before joining with Italy in 1954. Between 1719 and 1918, the Hapsburgs shaped its café-loving life and status as a European capital of coffee production.

Gateway to 30 per cent of Italy's green bean imports, Trieste's coffee industry embraces traders, graders, tasters and wholesalers, shipping agents, packagers, roasters and researchers. Salt air and espresso permeate the city from the waterfront avenues to the old town's Gothic and Renaissance landmarks, royal squares and Roman ruins.

Photography by PIERO CRUCIATTI AND TAMARA THIESSEN

# SALT AIR AND ESPRESSO

ONCE ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL PORTS IN THE AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN EMPIRE, TRIESTE IS NOW BEST-KNOWN AS THE HEART OF THE ITALIAN COFFEE INDUSTRY. TAMARA THIESSEN REPORTS.



Clockwise: Caffè San Marco, James Joyce's statue on the Grand Canale literary trail, the Serbian Orthodox St Spyridon Church, Trieste Marina, Bar Cataruzza, crowds at Molo Audace, the Mercato Coperto (indoor market).

Small time-honoured roasters such as Torrefazione Caffè San Giusto Antica are passionately dedicated to the art of roasting 'Italian style'. Another, Antica Tostatura Triestina, has grown bigger on fame, family name and pure product quality. Founded in 1995 by Alessandro Hausbrandt, who considers his great grandfather Hermann Ernest Hausbrandt the founding father of espresso coffee, blends such as Nessun Dorma and Buonissimo espresso are lauded by tastemakers.

**LITERARY HAUNTS**

Café and literary trails intertwine along the self-guided audio tours (free with the purchase of a FVG card) starting at the tourism office in Piazza dell'Unità (Via dell'Orologio 1, [www.turismo.fvg.it](http://www.turismo.fvg.it)).

During 15 years in Trieste, Irish writer James Joyce completed his short story-novel *Dubliners*, while also penning some chapters of *Ulysses*. Between 10 changes of address, he frequented iconic cafés including Caffè Stella Polare (Via Dante Alighieri 14) and the dark wood-panelled Pasticceria Pirona Caffè (Largo Barriera Vecchia 12), another treasury of Austro-Hungarian tastes with cream puffs, *putizza* (a dried fruit and nut log) and *presnitz* (hazelnut scrolls).

Joyce, Italo Svevo and Franz Kafka snuggled in among the red velvet, mirrors and hat racks of Illy-backing Caffè Tommaseo (Piazza Nicolò Tommaseo 4c). The waterside historic monument dating to 1830 was once nicknamed 'the cerebrals' circle' and a plaque outside recognises its pivotal place in supporting the 1848 risorgimento, which led to Italy's reunification. For Jan Morris, moody, art-decked Caffè San Marco (Via Cesare Battisti 18) is Trieste's most evocatively historic haunt.

Aided and abetted by a bit more espresso fuel, head to the cluster of antiques on San Giusto hill;

the castle, Foro Romano, and Gothic Cattedrale di San Giusto. Views here extend over the city, from the Adriatic to the highland forests bordering Slovenia just a few kilometres north.

**FISHY FLAVOURS**

The city comes alive at the hour of the *aperitivo*, when crisp white Collio wines from surrounding hillsides flow in bars and restaurants such as Osteria da Marino (Via del Ponte 5), a charming hole-in-the-wall cellar of home cooking and 700 wines. SaluMare (Via di Cavana 10) is a taste laboratory of all things fishy: *baccala mantecato* (house-smoked and cured pureed cod), *paté di burro e acciughe* (a butter and salted anchovy pâté), fish-topped bruschetta and salads of octopus, squid and sardines. In summer, a small crowd spills onto its corner terrazzo clutching glass goblets of regional vino and sparkling Prosecco. For formal fish dishes and fantastic views, head to Scabar (Via Erta di Sant'Anna 63) four kilometres above Trieste. The menu favours local shellfish, dairy and organic produce swallowed down with cross-border wines – Italian Friuli and Collio varieties, and Slovenian Karst and Istria.

Trieste's working class history and mix of Italian, Germanic and Slavic cultures erupts at its markets. The 1936 Art Nouveau undercover Mercato Coperto (Via della Maiolica) was designed to protect merchants from the infamous winds, which also saw them occasionally cling to ropes throughout the city.

The cries in local dialect by the *venderigole* selling their wares on Piazza Ponterosso can be heard every Tuesday to Saturday mornings at the fruit, vegetable and flower market. Crossing adjacent Ponte Rosso, you will pass the bronze statue of James Joyce before finding yourself on the Canal Grande, skirted by cafés and other eateries in brightly painted Venetian-style houses. ☺

**WHERE TO STAY**

**Urban Hotel Design**  
Contemporary art, a black leather lobby and milk-white room décor in an 18th-century building make this a memorable stay. Rooms are from US\$117/night with a smorgasbord breakfast. [www.urbanhotel.it](http://www.urbanhotel.it)

**Hotel Residence L'Albero Nascosto**  
This is a cosy hotel in the cobblestoned old town with a café-bar and charming reading corner. The 10 rooms have mini kitchenettes, stone walls and sofas, costing from US\$110/night. [www.alberonascosto.it](http://www.alberonascosto.it)

**HOW TO GET THERE**

Fly Qantas or Emirates from Australian ports to Milan. Trieste is 4.5 hours by train from Milan, 2.15 hours from Venice Marco Polo Airport and 1.5 hours from central Venice.

**TRIESTESPRESSO EXPO**

From October 23–25, 2014, the city of Trieste will host the seventh biennial edition of TriesteEspresso Expo. The event brings together all aspects of the espresso coffee industry under one roof for international coffee industry professionals. [www.triestespresso.it](http://www.triestespresso.it)

**CREMA PRO**

Crema Pro, a new brand in the Peter McInnes range, will be exhibiting its comprehensive range of premium espresso machine accessories at TriesteEspresso Expo this year.

logo and pic crema pro t/c

