Why not discover Italian heritage in a more unusual way?

IN THE CASTLES AMONG MYSTERIES, LEGENDS AND… GHOSTS

**Between reality and popular imagination, tales and historical events set within the walls of many of the 155 manor houses have fuelled rumours and beliefs of mysterious presences in the ancient rooms full of artistic treasures.**

Trentino's castles are not only a treasure trove of artistic and architectural treasures, but also of stories that bind them to the region and to the lives of the families who owned them, and even of mysterious presences that wander within their walls.

The journey through the mysteries of Trentino's castles begins with a short hike from the centre of **Arco**, along a path that climbs through olive groves and cypress trees to the entrance of the castle just above the town. It is perched on a rugged spur of rock, from which it dominates the Alto Garda plain, for undoubtedly one of the most beautiful views in Trentino. Of the old fortress, the towers, part of the surrounding walls and some ruined buildings remain intact. Inside, you can visit the Prigione del Sasso and the Torre Grande, the walls of which are decorated with a splendid cycle of 14th-century secular frescoes depicting ladies playing chess. Dramatic events shrouded in mystery are also linked to this castle, as are the figures of tyrants and oppressors who, according to popular legend, haunt its surroundings: in 1289, for example, **Antonio d'Arco** was killed because of the many atrocities he had committed, and it is said that his ghost still haunts the manor. Others believe it to be the ghost of a Venetian brigand, **Ottavio Avogadro**, who hid his considerable ill-gotten loot in the castle and was then executed to great acclaim.

Initially an eastern bulwark of the domains of the Counts of Arco, which subsequently fell into the hands of the powerful Lodron family, **Castel Romano** in Valle del Chiese was built in the 12th century with the aim of guarding the road that connected Brescia to the Giudicarie on the Sant'Antonio ridge, not far from the village of Pieve di Bono. The majestic rectangular tower, which dominates the valley, is testimony to how strategically important this structure was. Its progressive deterioration began when the Lodron counts transferred their power to other parts of Trentino, Austria and Bavaria. Occupied by Garibaldi's troops in 1866, it was subjected to shelling during the First World War. Of the frescoes that once covered the residential halls, only one 15th-century fresco, depicting a battle of armies, remains. The castle still retains a great deal of appeal, not least because of the legends surrounding it. According to the most popular one, in the 16th century, Countess **Dina Lodron** used to invite the most handsome young men of the domain here to kill them in order to hide her infidelity from her husband. A priest dealt justice and freed the community from the curse by killing the countess, whose spirit is said to still dwell in the castle. The castle can be easily reached by car from Strada up towards Por. The alternative is to follow the trail "The hidden forest of Castel Romano", a mule track that climbs from the car park of Cologna (a village in the municipality of Pieve di Bono).

**Castel Belfort** is located in the municipality of Spormaggiore on the Paganella Plateau, along the state road between the municipalities of Cavedago and Spormaggiore. It was built as a medieval castle in around 1311. Following careful restoration, the crenellated tower and perimeter walls can now be visited. It was built around 1311 by Tissone, son of Geremia I, with the approval of the Counts of Tyrol, and over the years, it underwent many changes of ownership. In 1670, following a devastating fire that destroyed most of it, it was rebuilt as a modern fortress, with the appearance we see today. In the middle of the 15th century, the knight Cristoforo Altspaur of the Reifer family, at that time owner of the castle, was struck by attacks of madness and paranoia to the extent that he tried to kill his third wife Orsola, convinced of her infidelity. Legend has it that Cristoforo is now a ghost thirsting for revenge and that his presence still hovers in the ruins of the castle, looking for evidence of betrayal.

The first thing you notice about **Castel Nanno** is its architecture: very unusual for a castle, with a central tower that seems to reflect the peaks of the Brenta Dolomites that frame it and almost protect it. Elegant and austere, it stands a short distance from the village of the same name in the Non Valley, on an elevation that makes it even more visible above the expanses of apple orchards.

Between 1611 and 1615, the castle was involved in the witch trials and in the vaulted hall on the first floor of the palace, three crosses are engraved on a protruding stone to commemorate the executions of as many women from the village. Other intriguing events made this castle famous. Last but not least, the love story between Melisenda and Ludovico of Castel Sporo, a bitter enemy of the Madruzzo family. The two young lovers, who used to meet in the shelter of an oak tree that still exists today, were caught in the act and walled up alive in a niche on the first floor of the castle. Even today, the memory of the two lovers seems to remain imprisoned within the walls of Castel Nanno. It is said that every night in May, the cries and lamentations of the two lovers echo as an eternal reminder of this love tragically cut short.

Located at the entrance to the Sole Valley and overlooking the Noce River, **Castel Caldes** towers over the nearby village of Solandra. The current appearance of the castle is the result of various architectural phases that began in the 13th century and continued until the 16th century.

Legend has it that the castle was the site of the imprisonment of a young woman named Olinda, who may have been Countess Marianna Elisabetta Thun. Promised in marriage to Count Ulrich of Altaguardia, the young woman was, however, in love with Arunte, a gentle, soft-spoken minstrel who had enchanted the girl.

The perfidious Rodemondo di Caldes, having become aware of this love, took his daughter and locked her up in the highest room of the castle. When Arunte realised this, he began to sing love poems under the window where the girl was being kept prisoner. But shouts, the clash of weapons and the subsequent silence told Olinda of the tragic fate of her beloved. Desperate, she let herself starve to death and was buried in the small village cemetery, where a young man came to visit her every night to sing beautiful love poems. The magnificent Stube del Conte (Count's Room) has recently been opened to the public, after careful restoration, and is now furnished in every detail. Together with the Stanza di Olinda (Olinda's Room), it represents the jewel in the crown of this building.

Along the historic Via Claudia Augusta Altinate, on top of the Tegazzo hill, stands **Castel Pergine**, an ancient fortification that dominates the entire Sugana Valley. The building, which stands on the site of a former Roman settlement, took on its present structure in the 13th century and was enlarged in the 16th century when the Prince-Bishop of Trento had what is now known as the "Clesiana Wing" built. Castel Pergine now houses some 20 rooms and three towers in which you can stay overnight, as well as a restaurant (open from the end of March to the beginning of November), which offers modern and sophisticated versions of some traditional Trentino and Italian dishes. Inside, you can visit the Prison of the Drop (Prigione della Goccia), the fireplace room, the throne room and the Chapel of St. Andrew (Cappella di Sant'Andrea) on the first floor. The five rooms on the second floor and the garden host temporary exhibitions.

The best-known legend linked to this manor is that of the "White Lady". It tells of a beautiful woman who has lived trapped within its walls for hundreds of years. This woman with her golden hair tied in a long plait was the wife of a tyrannical and violent Captain who ruled the village of Pergine in the Middle Ages, harassing its inhabitants. Nor did she escape the brutal ways of her husband, who prevented her from doing anything, even taking a simple walk outside the castle. Once a month only, she was allowed to walk in the courtyard, together with her lady-in-waiting and escorted by armed soldiers. Tired of her melancholy life and constant deprivation, one moonlit evening, with the help of her maid of honour, she put on a white silk dress that glowed in the moonlight, untied her braid, looked out of the dining room window and threw herself into the void. Still today, on full-moon nights, in the windows and halls of Pergine castle, you can see the fleeting shadow of a beautiful woman, dressed in white with long, loose hair. And hear a beautiful and broken voice singing a sweet song, wistfully praising freedom.

In the heart of the Adige Valley, **Castel Beseno**, located on the top of a hill halfway between Trento and Rovereto, is the most imposing fortified complex in the whole of Trentino, and is also shrouded in legends and mystery. The most popular stories tell of the apparitions of a man dressed in red appearing before solitary visitors, the screams of wandering spirits leaving the castle and the legend of the black knight who, in the mists of time, ruled over Besenello making absurd demands and inflicting continuous abuse. This particularly evil knight lorded over the people of the village of Besenello, imposing impossible taxes on them. But the people, tired and exhausted by the constant oppression, one day went up to the castle and stormed the stronghold, managing to drive out the tyrant once and for all. But it is said that on full-moon nights, a small flame roams the walls of the manor: it is the ghost of the Knight, condemned to wander for eternity to pay for his wrongdoings in life.

Further info: <https://www.visittrentino.info/en/guide/must-see/castles>

Trentino media room: <https://www.visittrentino.info/en/press>