



La dolce vita

If you like Venice, Prosecco and golf, **Peter Swain** has just the place for you. As well as the original Lido course, there is great golf and property in the surrounding Veneto, within 30 minutes of La Serenissima

With all those water hazards, you might think playing golf in Venice would be a risky proposition. In fact, the course on the Lido, the 7-mile long sandy island just across the lagoon from San Marco, has everything except canals.

The story goes that Henry Ford, an epic golf nut, arrived in Venice in 1928 wanting a game. Finding nowhere to play, he persuaded Count Volpi to buy some land and build a course. The club's early claim to fame was the first meeting in 1934 between Hitler and Mussolini at the Circolo del Golf di Venezia, as it became known. Rather more recently, it hosted the Italian Seniors Open in 2004.

The course is tight, quite heavily wooded, in immaculate condition and probably the driest patch of land in the city. Sean Connery plays here when he's attending the Venice Film Festival, also on the Lido. Unfortunately there are no houses for sale, but if you like the area, known as the Veneto, there's plenty

of property, very reasonably priced, at two clubs 30 minutes away.

The charming medieval town of Asolo sits on a hilltop surrounded by prosecco vineyards and olive groves. Forty-five minutes from skiing in Cortina, "the city of a hundred horizons" has Palladian villas, Renaissance frescoes and divine restaurants.

In the 1990s, the Benetton family of three billionaire brothers and a sister created a clothing empire, a very successful Formula One team, and a golf club with 27 very scenic holes at Asolo. The three 9-hole circuits are hilly, quite long and feature plenty of water. Practice facilities are excellent.

Around the course, 187 properties have been built over the past 10 years. Prices start at just €135,000 (£112,000) for a studio; two-bedroom apartments go for €220,000 (£183,000), and larger townhouses for €400,000 (£333,000).

The look owes something to the ski lodge – plenty of wood and stone, stylish shutters

and underground parking. Owners get substantial golf discounts, and pay about £1,500 annual service charge. And as this is a mature scheme, there are always resale properties available, often sold at a sizeable discount to new build.

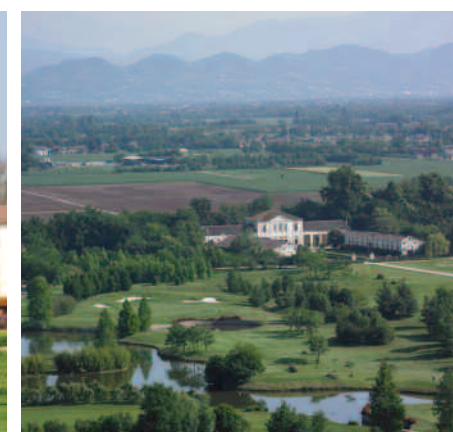
This being Italy, the heart of the whole set-up is the stylish clubhouse. The fresh pasta in the bar – I recommend the pumpkin ravioli – is the perfect end to any round. For dinner, the formal restaurant is spectacular. Golf widows can use the wellness centre, heated outdoor swimming pool and tennis courts, and there are always apartments for rent as well as a small guesthouse, ideal for short breaks.

Most buyers are Italian, with Brits in this part of the Veneto region relatively thin on the ground – either good or bad, depending on your perspective. One who has made the move, to a second golf development nearby at Castelfranco, is 39-year-old Archie Cochrane originally from North Berwick in Scotland.

"I first came here 14 years ago to work as a golf pro. It's just a brilliant area – skiing at Asiago, the Adriatic beach at Jesolo, plus golf, all within an hour's drive. The locals are friendly, very family orientated and quite metropolitan. They work hard and play hard – plenty of long dinners."



(Top): The history of golf in Venice can be traced to the creation – at Henry Ford's behest – of the Lido course in 1928. The tight, tree-lined layout has played host to the Italian Open and welcomes visitors year-round; originally from North Berwick, golf pro Archie Cochrane (above) made the move to the new development of Castelfranco (above right) 14 years ago; (below, l-r) houses at Asolo and computer generated images of property at Castelfranco



The 18-hole parkland course at Castelfranco has just finished a major overhaul. The site is flat with large bunkers and several lakes the major challenges. The big plus of the set-up is the nearby cultural, culinary and winter sporting attractions.

"All my friends want to see Venice when they come over – it's only half an hour away," says Archie. Access is easy with Ryanair flying into Treviso, a 20-minute drive away from both Asolo and Castelfranco.

Archie, his Italian wife, Tiziana, and their two young children, are moving into a new three-bedroom apartment overlooking the course built around the graceful Cà Amata. The region specialises in these Palladian mansions, built by rich Venetians as summer houses.



Peter Swain flew to Venice on BA, Momentum Travel: golfitalia.co.uk

Golf courses:
Asolo: asologolf.it
Castelfranco: golfcastelfranco.it
Venice: circulogolfvenezia.it
Condulmer: golfvillacondulmer.com
Menaggio: menaggio.it
Villa D'Este: golfvilladeste.com

Tourist boards:
visitvenice.co.uk

Property:
www.asologolf.it
www.caamata.it
www.cluttonsresorts.com

Local golf tour operator
www.amazingvenicegolf.com



Alps, the Italian Lakes have even better courses. Lake Como is so stylish, George Clooney, Sting and Richard Branson have palazzos on its shores. With golf courses at Menaggio and Villa D'Este close by, it's also the site of a new boutique development, Residenza del Lago Azure.

With magnificent views over the lake, the gated resort has 28 villas and apartments with a choice of one, two and three bedrooms. "Occasionally we come across a development that ticks every box," says Robert Green of Cluttons Resorts. "This will appeal to the British second-home market both as an investment and as a lifestyle purchase."

The chic interiors of the properties, built in local stone, feature large picture windows to maximize the views. The development has a private leisure club with a sauna, gym and jacuzzi plus onsite concierge and private underground parking. A glass walled lift takes residents up the hillside to their homes. Prices start at €398,500 (£331,000).

The par-70 course at Menaggio has a traditional British feel, while the club at Villa D'Este is as famous for its restaurant as its course. Both are over 80 years old.

By far the best way to see this lot is to take a golfing holiday in Italy. Momentum – Golf Italia organize bespoke trips to the best courses throughout the country from Puglia in the south to the Lakes and the Veneto in the north. ☒

