



## FACT FILE

Selected DOCG/  
DOCs & top grapes  
DOCG

**Ramandolo** 60ha\*\*;  
Verduzzo Friulano

## DOC

**Grave** 2,273ha\*\*;  
Pinot Grigio, Merlot,  
Sauvignon Blanc

**Collio** 1,319ha\*;  
Pinot Grigio,  
Sauvignon Blanc,  
Chardonnay

**Colli Orientali**  
1,208ha\*\*; Friulano,  
Sauvignon Blanc,  
Merlot

**Isonzo** 712ha\*\*;  
Pinot Grigio,  
Sauvignon Blanc,  
Chardonnay

**Carso** 58ha\*;  
Malvasia Istriana,  
Vitovska, Sauvignon  
Blanc

\*2012 vineyard  
surface ha

\*\*DOC vineyard ha

The *Decanter* travel guide to

# Friuli, Italy

Stretching from the Alps to the Adriatic, Friuli is home to rolling hills, picturesque villages and a wealth of boutique wine producers. Simon Woolf shares tips on how best to plan a trip

I SUSPECT IT can be a bit slow if you're a news reporter in Friuli. One of last year's bigger stories was a scandal alleging the presence of illegal additives in Sauvignon Blanc. Friuli-Venezia Giulia, to use the full and rather confusing name (Venice is not part of the region), is a peaceful, genteel corner of Italy, lacking big-ticket tourist attractions and generally more concerned with agriculture and viticulture.

It wasn't ever thus. Modern-day Italy's most northeasterly quarter has been disputed and fought over since antiquity – by Romans, Byzantines, Venetians and Habsburgs. Although most visible scars have healed, the region remains noticeably cross-cultural: Slavic influences permeate the easterly areas,

while the northerly Alpine part bordering Austria is decidedly Germanic.

For visitors seeking outstanding food and wine, and beautiful countryside, the region is a paradise. Friuli doesn't get overrun with indiscriminate tourists, which has helped preserve a sense of authenticity and character that is harder to find in Tuscany or Piedmont. It also offers an unbeatable combination of dramatic mountain scenery, rolling vineyard vistas and idyllic Adriatic coastline.

The best wine areas are concentrated around the southeastern part of the region, especially in the hilly sub-regions of Collio and Colli Orientali (*collio* means hill in Italian). Neighbouring Isonzo valley and Friuli Carso are also important. Udine, Cormons and Gorizia are attractive bases for a wine-themed trip. All have a certain *mitteleuropa* elegance, and plenty of diversions beyond wine.

Planning a hypothetical north-to-south tour, you'd start in the northerly DOCG area of Ramandolo, a set of dramatic hills which starts to feel increasingly Alpine as it approaches neighbouring Austria. Centred around the Roman town of Nimis, the DOCG is

**Above: perched on a ravine, Cividale del Friuli is the perfect stop before exploring Colli Orientali**

solely for sweet wines, made from indigenous variety, Verduzzo Friulano.

## A perfect food match

Just as the Bordelais prefer to drink Sauternes as an aperitif, so Friulians know that the honeyed, mildly tannic, high-acid Ramandolo goes best with the local Prosciutto di San Daniele (similar to Prosciutto di Parma) or with Montasio cheese. I Comelli is one of the 30 producers in the Consorzio Tutela Vini Ramandolo with excellent wines and a peaceful *agriturismo* near the winery ([info@icomelli.com](mailto:info@icomelli.com)).

Ramandolo DOCG is contained within the dog-leg-shaped Colli Orientali DOC, which stretches down to the plains around Cormons. Colli Orientali's green, sweeping valleys are home to myriad small, quality-focused wineries and several different wine styles. Around the village of Prepotto, the rediscovered red variety Schioppettino is king. Ronchi di Cialla ([info@ronchidicialla.com](mailto:info@ronchidicialla.com)) produces elegant, refined wines from this fascinating peppery variety, not to mention a standout white blend. Antico Broilo ([info@anticobroilo.com](mailto:info@anticobroilo.com)) and La Viarte ([laviarte@laviarte.it](mailto:laviarte@laviarte.it)) also produce excellent Schioppettino. The latter has an attractively located tasting room overlooking vineyards.

Two cult producers not to be forgotten >



Map: Maggie Nelson

## My perfect day in Friuli

### Morning

After breakfast at the peaceful Colli di Poianis *agriturismo*\*, drive 15 minutes into Cividale del Friuli. Perched on a ravine created by the river Natisone, Cividale is crammed full of medieval history, plus some excellent shopping opportunities.

Energised by a mid-morning *café* in Cividale's main square, drive to Ronchi di Cialla, set in one of the Colli Orientali's prettiest valleys. You'll meet the Rapuzzi family, the saviours of Schioppettino from obscurity and producers of some of the best wines in the region.

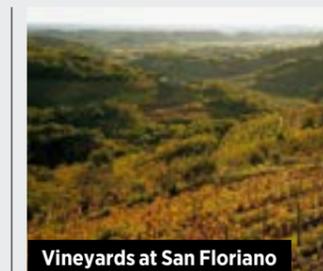
### Lunch

From here it's a short hop to the village of Prepotto, to refuel at Trattoria da Mario\*. Your only challenge is to exercise enough restraint to justify dinner later on.

### Afternoon

After lunch, drive 30 minutes to San Floriano, high in the Collio hills. Il Carpino ([www.ilcarpino.com](http://www.ilcarpino.com)) is one of a clutch of small producers around the village who make 'orange wines'. Franco's tasting room is the perfect place for a masterclass on long skin maceration.

A few minutes away is the town of Oslavia. Try to catch dusk as you ascend the war memorial tower just outside the town. The



Vineyards at San Floriano

incredible vista of rolling hills and vineyards before you is a patchwork of Italy and Slovenia.

### Evening and overnight

After a scenic 30-minute drive, finish with dinner at Terra & Vini ([www.terraevini.it](http://www.terraevini.it)), an osteria in Brazzano which also acts as front of house for world-famous winery, Livio Felluga. Although wines by the glass are limited to Felluga, the full list offers a varied selection from Friuli Collio, as does the ensuite *enoteca*. The food is traditional, uncomplicated and quite exquisite.

If you're feeling very lazy, Terra & Vini has well-appointed rooms above the restaurant, but only a five-minute stroll away is the charming *agriturismo* Zorzon ([www.zorzon.it](http://www.zorzon.it)). The rooms and apartments back onto jaw-droppingly beautiful Collio vineyards and a small church.

\*For more detail, turn to page 95



'For visitors seeking outstanding food and wine, and beautiful countryside, the region is a paradise'



**Clockwise from top left: the vineyards of Collio are home to some of the region's finest wineries; Formentini Castle in the town of San Floriano; Montasio cheese; the talented Le Due Terre family**

are Le Due Terre ([fortesilvana@libero.it](mailto:fortesilvana@libero.it)), just outside Prepotto, and I Clivi ([iclivi@gmail.com](mailto:iclivi@gmail.com)). Le Due Terre's Schioppettino/Refosco blend Sacrisassi would surely be a first growth if it were in Bordeaux. I Clivi has vineyards in both Colli Orientali and Collio, and specialises in stunning, long-aged white wines, made mainly from Friulano.

Many of these wineries are family estates where you'll be tasting at the winemaker's kitchen table. Most are happy to receive a small number of guests, provided that you make arrangements in advance – so do be sure to email or phone ahead.

### Local pride

The bucolic rolling hills of Collio are not only some of the region's most beautiful – they also harbour some of its most iconic winemakers. Fierce independence is characteristic here, as cultural identity must transcend the nonsensical border drawn after World War II. This has left families and vineyards artificially parcellated between Friuli Collio on one side and Slovenian Goriška Brda on the other.

The hillsides surrounding San Floriano and

Oslavia provide the perfect terroir for Ribolla Gialla, a thick-skinned white variety that can be very neutral when vinified as a fresh, young wine, but becomes complex, regal and thrilling when made as a *vino bianco macerato* – an orange wine, to use the now-popular term for white wines made with long skin contact. The Oslavia area is a hotbed for this style, and you'll find seminal producers such as Radikon ([info@radikon.it](mailto:info@radikon.it)), Gravner ([info@gravner.it](mailto:info@gravner.it)) and Dario Prinčič dotted around its twisting lanes. These are all Slovenian families, fluent in Italian and Slovene but not necessarily English.

For a reminder of why Friuli rose to fame as the go-to region for pure, varietal white wines, head to Borgo del Tiglio ([info@borgodeltiglio.it](mailto:info@borgodeltiglio.it)), where Nicola Manfredari produces refined, delicate expressions of the important local varieties Friulano and Malvasia Istriana, in addition to Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc.

While the Collio is primarily famous for its whites, the Isonzo valley provides alluvial plains and clay soils that are perfect for the region's red grapes. Pinot Noir, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon are popular, and with good reason as they can be very successful. ➤

## Your Friuli address book

### Accommodation

#### Agriturismo Colli di Poianis, Prepotto

Maura and Gabriele offer generously sized apartments in a peaceful location just a few kilometres away from Prepotto. You'll sample Maura's baking and passion for local, artisanal foods at breakfast. A wine tasting and tour of the estate is also highly recommended.

[www.collidipoianis.it](http://www.collidipoianis.it)

#### Agriturismo Paraschos, San Floriano del Collio

Set in a wonderful location overlooking the vineyards of San Floriano del Collio, these modern, stylish and spacious rooms are directly above the estate's cellars. Don't miss the Paraschos family's excellent wines, including some made in amphorae along the same lines as Josko Gravner's. [www.paraschos.it](http://www.paraschos.it)

#### Relais Lis Neris, San Lorenzo Isontino

Situated in the middle of Friuli Isonzo, in the small village of San Lorenzo Isontino, an old farm courtyard has been lovingly restored by the Pecorari family to provide four sizeable, comfortable apartments. Everything at this estate is done with style and panache, including the wines. If you thought Pinot Gris was boring, everyday stuff, let Alvaro Pecorai change that impression forever.

[www.lisneris.it/en/relais](http://www.lisneris.it/en/relais)

#### Palazzo Lantieri, Gorizia

Set in a stately 14th-century courtyard right in the centre of Gorizia, these grand but characterful rooms and apartments have gorgeous parquet floors and vintage furniture. Breakfast is also rather special.

[www.palazzo-lantieri.com](http://www.palazzo-lantieri.com)



Palazzo Lantieri

### Restaurants

#### Orsone, Cividale del Friuli

Joe and Lidia Bastianich opened this smart, cosmopolitan restaurant and bar in 2013. Situated right by their winery, close to Cividale del Friuli, the modern European cooking is top notch, as is the service. The sommelier is truly outstanding – let her suggest creative wine matches. [www.orsone.com](http://www.orsone.com)

#### Osteria d'Alchemista, Gorizia

Despite the name, this is a wine bar buried in the back streets. Owner Stefano specialises in natural wines and has some real treasures. Graze on local meats and cheeses, and catch some live music. [www.facebook.com/Osteria-Lalchimista](https://www.facebook.com/Osteria-Lalchimista)

**Osteria-Lalchimista-1467327083558687**

#### Osteria di Ramandolo



#### Osteria di Ramandolo

Clinging to one of Ramandolo's higher peaks, this osteria allows a wonderful view of the Monte Bernadia hills, plus some very good eating. Decidedly upper-class cooking, with clever twists on traditional Friulian dishes. The wine list is varied and similarly original.

[www.osteriadiramandolo.it](http://www.osteriadiramandolo.it)

#### Trattoria da Mario, Enoteca dello Schioppettino, Prepotto

There's no better place for a good lunch than this unpretentious eatery. Cosy, warm and inviting, the food and the interior are as traditional as it gets. Even better, it has a superb selection of the local Schioppettino di Prepotto to sample by the glass or bottle.

[www.enotecaschioppettino.it](http://www.enotecaschioppettino.it)



### Shopping

#### Al Ponte, La Botteguccia dei Sapori, Cividale del Friuli

Although this delicatessen is tiny, it's absolutely stuffed full of local, artisanal products – think fine olive oils, cured meats, pastries and outstanding honey. [bottegucciadeisapori.oneminutesite.it](http://bottegucciadeisapori.oneminutesite.it)

#### Covered market, Gorizia

Housed in an elegant market building on the Corso Verdi, the stalls here offer seasonal, local vegetables, cheese, meats, seafood and more. This is very much a living, breathing part of the city, not a chi-chi tourist attraction. Open Monday to Friday mornings and Saturday all day.

### How to get there ✈

**Fly directly to Friuli-Venezia Giulia Airport (often called Trieste Airport, although it is in Monfalcone) from London, Barcelona, Munich, Valencia and some Italian cities. This is a short drive (30-40 minutes) away from Gorizia, Udine, Cormons and the Carso. While offering more choice, Venice Marco Polo Airport is 90 minutes drive from the heart of the wine country.**

**By rail, connect to Udine railway station from Salzburg, or travel to Trieste via Rome.**

**Driving is a stress-free experience since roads are generally quiet, except for the metropolitan area around Trieste.**



*'Friuli offers an unbeatable combination of dramatic mountain scenery, rolling vineyard vistas and idyllic Adriatic coastline'*

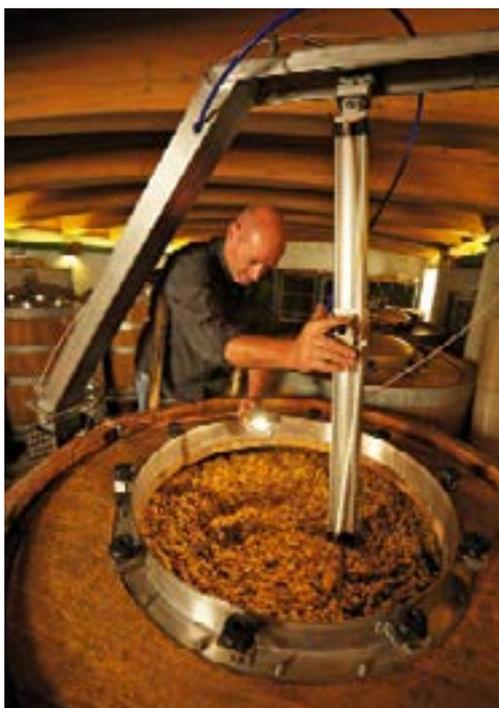
Easy-going, herbaceous Refosco, and the fierce, rather wild Pignol are indigenous varieties to seek out. Fulvio Bressan's ([info@bressanwines.com](mailto:info@bressanwines.com)) Pignol is one of the most characterful and ageworthy around.

Heading south from the Collio down the tiny strip of Adriatic coastline towards Trieste brings you to another different landscape, and the region's only formal wine route. The limestone hills that form the Carso plateau are heavily wooded, and everything feels a little bit wilder here.

### Enclave of individuals

Friuli's second Prepotto – the one in Carso rather than the one in Colli Orientali – is home to a clutch of highly individual and accomplished winemakers. Sandi Skerk ([info@skerk.com](mailto:info@skerk.com)) and Benjamin Zidarich ([info@zidarich.it](mailto:info@zidarich.it)) are masters of low-intervention winemaking. Both produce highly accomplished white blends made with long skin macerations, and individual expressions of the local Terrano – a nervy red variety with tannins and acid that need a skilled winemaker to tame them. Skerk, Zidarich and their illustrious neighbour Edi Kante ([kante@kante.it](mailto:kante@kante.it)) all have extraordinary cellars cut into the limestone rock.

The mild climate, moderated both by the Alps and the Adriatic, isn't just beneficial for grapes, but also for visitors. Friuli is particularly beautiful in October – and visitors at this time can pencil in Ein Prosit, a major wine and



**Wines made from the vineyards of Sandi Skerk (pictured, top), and those of Benjamin Zidarich (above), are produced with as little interference in the cellar as possible; Stanko Radikon (left) is one of Oslovja's leading winemakers**

gastronomy festival set in the jaw-droppingly beautiful alpine village of Malborghetto.

If you prefer the summer sun, and you're not a vegetarian, consider visiting San Daniele for Aria di Festa at the end of June, an entire festival dedicated to the town's lip-smacking, eponymous ham.

There couldn't be a better demonstration of the priorities in Friuli – if Slow Food celebrates all that is traditional and regional, slow tourism would appear to sum up the visiting experience perfectly. **D**

[www.turismofvg.it/food-and-wine](http://www.turismofvg.it/food-and-wine)

*Writer, columnist and natural wine specialist, Simon Woolf won the 2015 Born Digital Award for work on his blog, [www.the-morningclaret.com](http://www.the-morningclaret.com)*