

So here we are in Friuli, tucked away in a remote corner of the Alpine foothills in northeastern Italy, at a little restaurant. I have to admit that when I travel, history is not the first thing on my mind. Food and wine are. And that's what sold me on Friuli. It is famous as a source of some of Italy's best white wines. We went primarily in search of wines, unaware that we soon would make a culinary detour.

Occupying the extreme northeast corner of Italy, Friuli's scenery ranges from rugged coastline along the eastern border to placid plains in the west and the majestic Alps in the north, where Italy butts up against Austria. Directly to the south is Venice, just a little more than an hour and a half away.

Though off the beaten tourist track, Friuli is hard in the path of history. Standing at one of the major crossroads between Western Europe and the East, it was conquered by just about everyone who passed by. As a result, things look different here. Rather than the familiar cultural overlay of most of Italy, the central European influence is readily apparent in Friuli. The architecture tends more toward Austrian grandeur than Tuscan simplicity. Here you'll find gray stone castles rather than sun-drenched villas. The people look different, too, taller and blonder than southern Italians, and with plenty of German and Central European surnames.

Reading, Adult Level (369 Syllables)