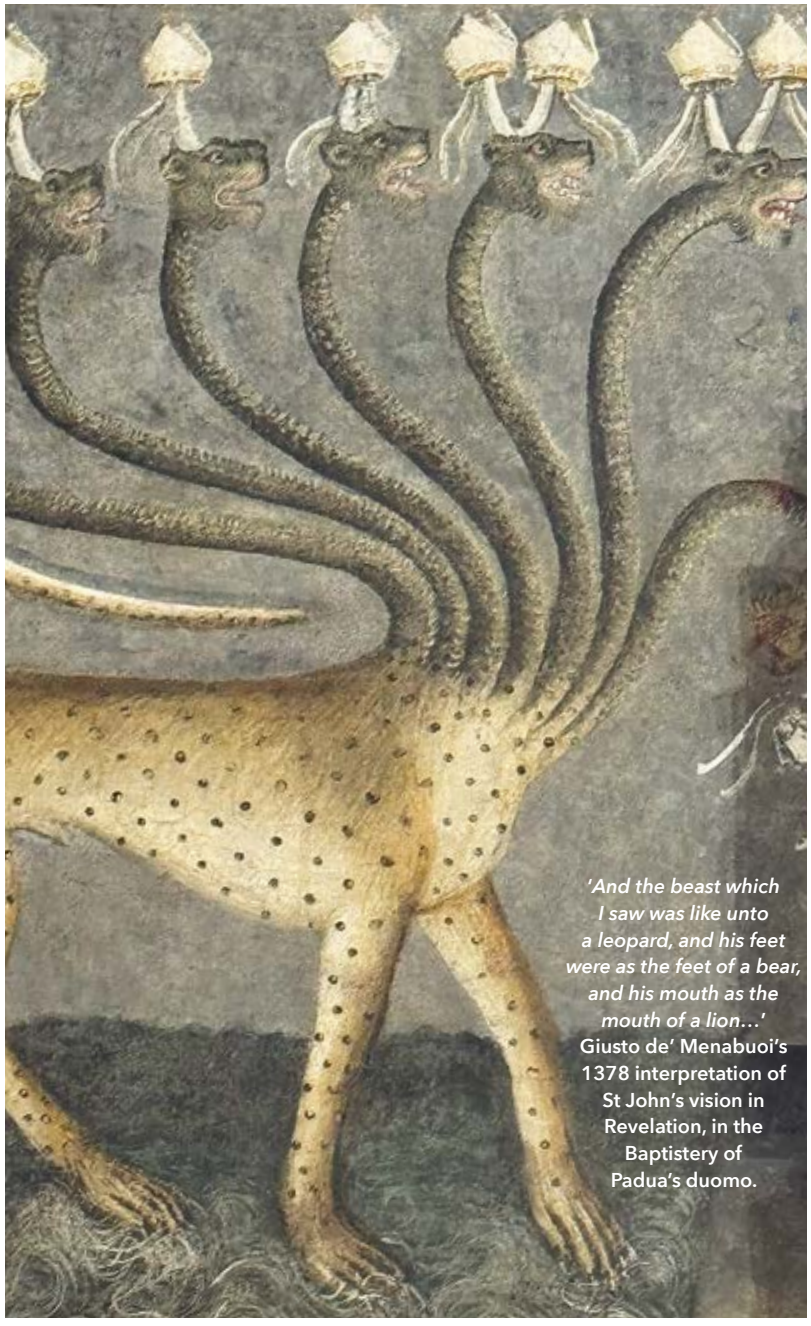


'And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion…' Giusto de' Menabuoi's 1378 interpretation of St John's vision in Revelation, in the Baptistery of Padua's duomo.

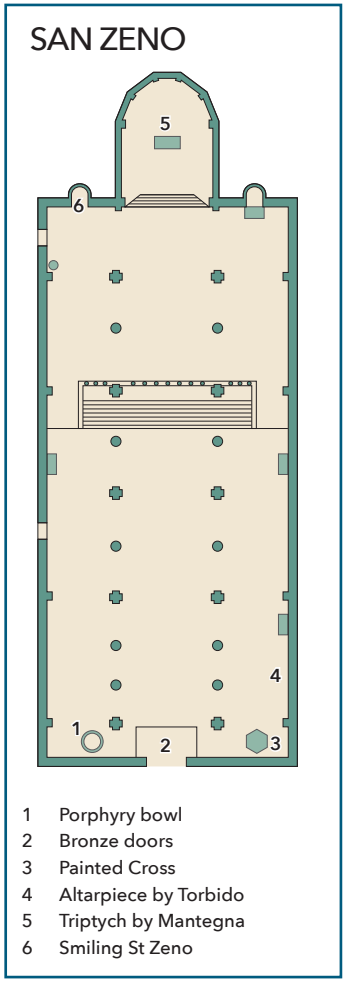
PADUA

Padua, in Italian *Pádova (map Veneto East B2)*, is one of the most ancient cities in Italy with a famous university (the second oldest in the country) and a large student population. It is a busy, lively place, visited for its numerous important works of art (including frescoes by Giotto), for its busy markets, and for its famous shrine of St Anthony. Padua is the place where the saint carried out many miracles and his burial chapel, 'Il Santo', is visited every year by millions of pilgrims. Donatello was just one of the famous Renaissance artists who carried out works of art to embellish the city, which was a leading centre of Humanism in the 15th century. The centre of the old town is characterised by pleasant arcaded streets and narrow cobbled lanes, but other districts had to be rebuilt after damage in WWII. Like all larger towns in the north of Italy, it has less overtly friendly outskirts.

Highlights of Padua, from a visitor's point of view, are the Scrovegni Chapel, with frescoes by Giotto; the Basilica of the Santo, with the tomb of St Anthony and works by Donatello; the magnificent medieval Palazzo della Ragione and the markets that surround it; and the venerable University, which can be visited on a guided tour. A short distance away is Palladio's magnificent villa La Malconenta.

HISTORY OF PADUA

The Roman historian Livy, born near *Patavium* (Padua) in 59 BC, claimed that the cities of the Po valley were founded by Antenor, Aeneas' fellow refugee from Troy. In reality the site was probably already occupied before the 8th or 7th century BC by palaeo-Venetic tribes. It received full Roman franchise in 89 BC. The town prospered under Byzantine and Lombard rule and declared itself an independent republic as early as 1164. The foundation of the university in 1222 attracted distinguished teachers to Padua, including Dante and Petrarch, as well as numerous students from England, and the city came to be known as *La Dotta* ('The Learned'). In 1237–54 Ezzelino da Romano was tyrant of Padua, then after the suzerainty of the Carraresi (1318–1405) the city was conquered by the Venetians, and remained a faithful ally of Venice until the end of the Venetian Republic. Along with Venice, it was ceded to Austria in 1797 and its celebrated coffee house, Caffè Pedrocchi, was an important meeting-place for patriots during the Risorgimento. It became a command post for troop movements during WWI and the armistice that followed Austria's defeat at the battle of Vittorio Veneto was signed at Villa Giusti on the southeastern outskirts. Today, Padua is a fairly prosperous town with many light industries.



In the **sanctuary** is a huge altarpiece in wonderful colours and excellent condition (in its original frame), which is one of the great works by Mantegna **(5)**. This triptych, memorable also for its garlands which unite the three scenes (together with the pilasters with classical tondi in 'relief'), shows the Madonna with angel musicians and eight saints. The figures are depicted as if seen from a low viewpoint. It was painted between 1457 and 1459 in Padua after Mantegna had carried out the frescoes there in the church of the Eremitani, and the year before he moved to Mantua. The altarpiece clearly left a lasting impression on the local school of painting in Verona. The predella is a copy, Mantegna's wonderful original being now in the Louvre.

The frescoes in the apse behind and above the altarpiece are attributed to Martino da Verona (late 14th century). A 12th-century sarcophagus serves as high altar. On the balustrade are statues of Christ and the Apostles thought to be by a German sculptor working c. 1250.

In the north apse is a colossal polychrome **seated figure of St Zeno (6)**, shown smiling, by a 13th-century sculptor.

The crypt has beautiful pink columns in various colours.

San Bernardino

Some way south of San Zeno is the church of San Bernardino (1466; *map Verona 5*), entered through the cloister in front of the west façade, which has pretty carving round the portal. The first chapel on the south side has a barrel vault and was frescoed all over in the early 16th century by the local painter Giolfino. The altarpiece in the second chapel is by Francesco Bonsignori. The damaged frescoes in the fourth chapel are attributed to Domenico Morone and his son Francesco, and Domenico painted the organ doors in the north aisle. The chapel at the end of this aisle is entirely covered with 16th-century paintings in a gilded framework. Outside is a sculpted polychrome *Pietà*. On the right of the sanctuary is a vestibule and circular chapel, a very refined work by Michele Sanmicheli (1557). In the north aisle is a charming organ (1481) on a graceful bracket and a Baroque altar by Francesco Bibiena, better known as a theatre designer. Domenico's best frescoes (1503) are in the Sala Morone (entered from outside the church).

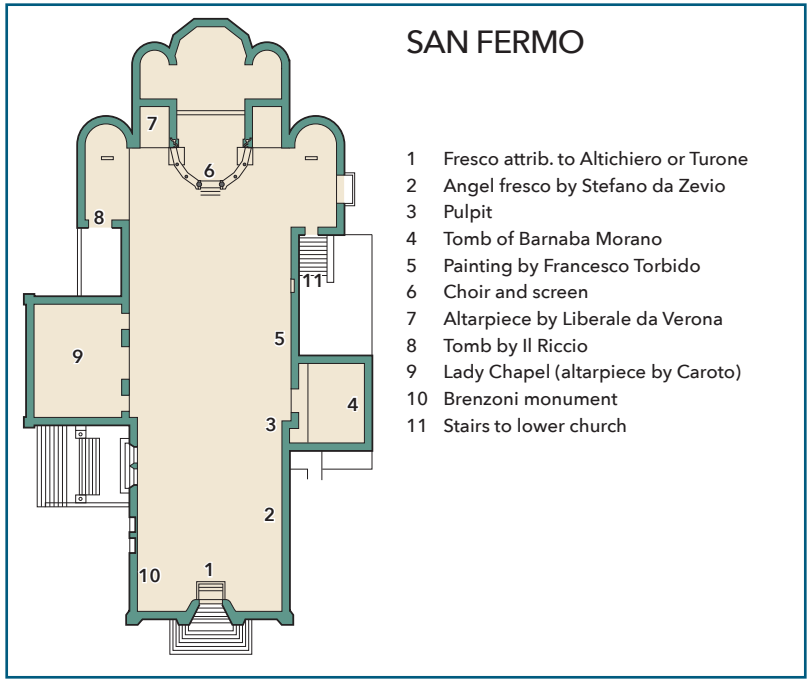
SAN FERMO

Map Verona 7–8. For opening times and visitor information, see chieseverona.it.

A Benedictine church built from 1065 to 1138 survives below a second church rebuilt by the Friars Minor around 1313 in a Gothic style. On the façade is the tomb of Antonio Fracastoro, physician of the Della Scala, who died in 1368. The 15th-century porch on the north side protects a fine portal of 1363.

Interior of San Fermo

The broad interior, without aisles, has a very fine wooden ceiling of 1314 which has a frieze of portrait heads of 416 saints (explained in a panel in the nave), and the various frescoes on the walls mostly date from the same time. Over the west doorway is a **fresco (1)** attributed to Altichiero or Turone. On the south side, beyond the first altar, unfortunately very high up, is a delightful angel **fresco by Stefano da Zevio (2)**. The marble **pulpit (3)** and (in the adjoining chapel) the wall-mounted **tomb of Barnaba Morano (4)**, were made by the same little-known sculptor, called Antonio da Mestre in 1306–1412. Outside is a lovely plain sarcophagus supported by two red marble oxen. The third altar has a **painting by Francesco Torbido (5)**.



in the early 1570s but left incomplete. If finished, it would have been a palace on a colossal scale.

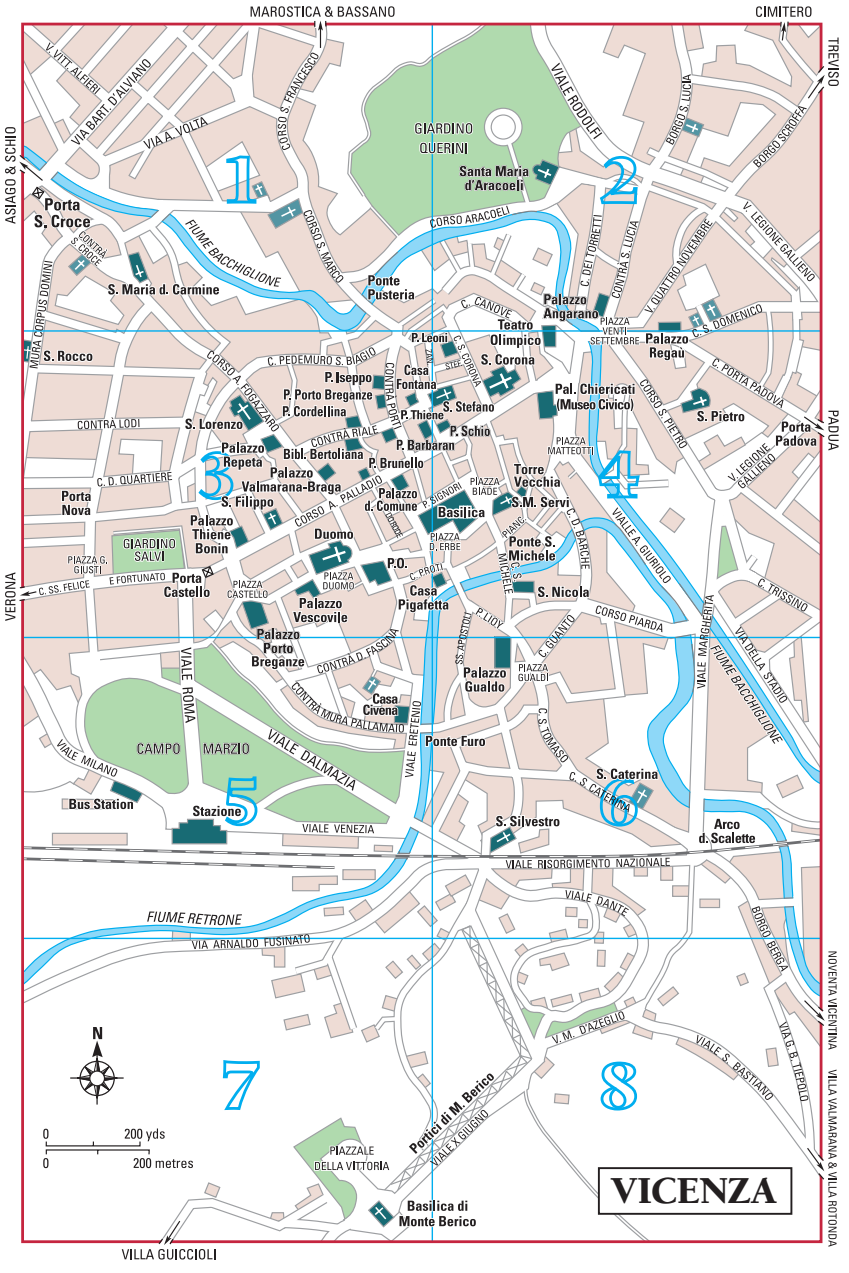
ANDREA PALLADIO

Andrea di Pietro della Gondola (1508–80), nicknamed Palladio (from Pallas Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom) by his patron, the poet Giangiorgio Trissino (1478–1550), designed villas, palaces and churches throughout the Veneto in a Classical style that would profoundly change the face of the region and inspire numerous imitations. His *Quattro Libri*, or *Four Books on Architecture*, became a manual for later architects, especially in England and the United States. In the engraved illustrations for this treatise, Palladio noted the significant dimensions of his buildings, linking together their plan, section and elevation in a series of proportional relationships. The seemingly easy elegance that distinguishes Palladio's designs was, in fact, the result of his careful calculation of such proportional relationships. In applying these systems of numerical progression, which were often associated with contemporary musical harmonic theory, to the spatial relationships of a building, Palladio succeeded in creating the pleasing visual harmonies that characterise his architecture.

From Piazza Castello, the handsome Corso Palladio leads east. This is the principal street of Vicenza, with many fine palaces and fashionable clothes shops. At no. 13 on the left, with engaged Corinthian columns on two storeys, is **Palazzo Thiene Bonin Longare**, apparently designed by Palladio but probably continued by Vincenzo Scamozzi. It has a fine atrium and courtyard (and a garden beyond). Opposite is **Palazzo Capra**, transformed into shops but preserving its portal commissioned from Palladio in the 1540s: Ionic pilasters flank the doorway, and smaller Corinthian ones decorate the window above the balcony. Further on, the handsome Neoclassical façade on a high plinth of the church of **San Filippo Neri** was built in 1824 by Antonio Piovene on a design by Ottone Calderari. It contains a good 18th-century organ made by the Favorito brothers.

Beyond the Venetian-Gothic **Palazzo Thiene** (no. 47), in pink and peach pastel colours (once a 15th-century palace, it now has a modern interior), is the much better-preserved **Palazzo Brunello** (no. 67), painted in a deeper red, with its portico over the pavement and an interesting courtyard. It has two little balconies and roundels with reliefs of Roman emperors in profile over the central window on the *piano nobile*. Opposite, Contrà do Rode leads under **Palazzo Pojana**, also by Palladio, and beyond is the huge **Palazzo del Comune**, the Town Hall, with its flags, formerly a private palace, begun by Vincenzo Scamozzi in 1592 but only finished in 1662. It has a massive columned portico extending over the pavement, and classical columns in the courtyard.

Further up at no. 147 is **Palazzo da Schio**, known as the Ca' d'Oro since it resembles a 15th-century Venetian-Gothic palace. Its brick exterior has four little



VICENZA PRACTICAL TIPS

VISITOR CARD

Free entry to selected sites comes with the Vicenza Silver Card or Vicenza Gold Card, available from the tourist office or museum ticket offices. For information, see the website: *teatrolimpicovicenza.it/en/info/facilities-2*

GETTING AROUND

• **By train**: Vicenza is within easy reach of Padua (trains take just over 15mins) and Verona (c. 25mins) and there are also services to Treviso. Regional stopping trains also run, taking longer between the main centres but connecting Vicenza to small places in its hinterland.

WHERE TO STAY

€€ **Due Mori.** The oldest hotel in Vicenza, opened in 1854 and now offering a comfortable blend of old and new, in an excellent position right in the centre of town. *Contrà Do Rode 24, albergoduemori.it. Map Vicenza 3.*

WHERE TO EAT

€ **Righetti.** A very inconspicuous restaurant, though right in the centre of town, frequented by locals. Excellent quality and reasonably priced regional dishes. You set your own table, and go to the counter to order, and pay at the desk at the end. There is also seating outside in the piazza in good weather. *Piazza Duomo 3, selfrighetti.it. Map Vicenza 3.*

There are numerous wine bars in Vicenza. **La Meneghina** (*Contrà Cavour 18; champagneforbreakfast.wine*) first opened in 1791 (*the street leads down to Piazza dei Signori past the flank of the Palazzo del Comune; map Vicenza 3*). **Ostaria il Grottino**, in Piazza delle Erbe, is a good place for drinks, snacks, sandwiches and small plates (*map Vicenza 4*). **Pasticceria Sorarù**, in Piazza dei Signori, has plenty of seating outside (*map Vicenza 4*).

LOCAL SPECIALITIES

The vineyards on the Colli Berici produce renowned wines.

A symbol of the town is dried stockfish, *bacalà alla vicentina*, cooked in various ways (and spelt thus, instead of with two 'c's as in Venice. There is even a local confraternity which celebrates the fish, which was introduced from Norway into the region when fresh fish was hard to come by (*see baccalaallavicentina.it*).

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

Festival of the Madonna di Monte Berico, Sept 8.

THE VENETO VILLAS

Most of Palladio's villas in the Veneto (and many from later periods) are to be found in the province of Vicenza. The names of the villas tend to change with each new owner (and can end up as long as a DNA string), but they generally also carry the name of the original proprietor. They are scattered widely over the province, often in remote areas outside small towns, having been designed as retreats from the hustle and bustle. Many of them are still privately owned and by no means all are open to the public. In some cases, the exteriors and gardens are often their most important features, some being surrounded by extensive parks. Opening times change frequently and accessibility varies. The best way to visit the villas, since some are quite a distance off the beaten track, is by car.

THE VILLAS OF THE VENETO

The province of Vicenza is particularly rich in villas of the famous '*Veneto Villa*' type. These were built from the 15th century onwards by rich noble Venetian families who were anxious to invest in land on the *terraferma* and contribute to its fertility by the construction of canals and irrigation systems. The names of the villas typically changed with each new owner, but they generally also carry the name of the original proprietor: sometimes the official name forms a long string. In the early 16th century Palladio invented an architecture peculiarly fitted to these prestigious villas, which he saw both as places of repose and as working farms: many still preserve their extensive outbuildings. Palladio derived their design in part from the villas of the ancient Romans and used Classical features in their construction. He took particular care in the siting of his villas, sometimes on low hills or near canals, and almost always surrounded by gardens and farmland. The distinctive service wings are known as *barchesse*. The name comes from the boat houses which were provided for the earliest villas on the Brenta Canal.

Numerous villas by Palladio survive in the province. In the 17th and 18th centuries many more villas were constructed, some of these particularly interesting for their interiors and frescoes (including some by Tiepolo and his son Gian Domenico). Architects of importance who succeeded Palladio include Vincenzo Scamozzi (1552–1616), who was born in Vicenza and who completed a number of Palladio's buildings here, although he also worked extensively in Venice and other parts of the Veneto. Other architects influenced by Palladio were Antonio Pizzocaro, Francesco Muttoni and Giorgio Massari. Orazio Marinali was responsible for the statuary in many of the gardens.