Italy’s Dolomite Mountains in Autumn

Northeastern Italy features one of the most distinctive and photogenic mountain landscapes on Earth—the Dolomites. Steeply vertical walls of pale gray rock rise to nearly 10,000 feet above forested foothills, deep valleys, sweeping meadows, crystal-clear alpine lakes, and charming mountain towns.

Three hundred million years ago enormous coral reefs over 3,000-feet-high emerged from a shallow sea floor. The area was uplifted when the Adriatic and Eurasian plates collided and then eroded and carved over time into the craggy chains of superbly exposed peaks that characterize the landscape today. Due to its unique geology and breathtaking beauty, the region was recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2009—calling it an archetype of a Dolomitic landscape. In summer and winter, this stunning area unsurprisingly teems with hikers and cyclists or skiers. Visit in autumn, however, and the tourist crowds diminish and a silence descends. The October air is clearer and the sun sits lower in the sky. Shadows deepen on the pale rock walls and pinnacles of the Dolomites, providing dramatic graphic imagery. The light-colored rock is transformed by the changing light conditions from dawn to dusk. Below the peaks, forests of larch trees turn a rich golden hue, a brilliant glow that contrasts perfectly with the dark green of conifers. An early snow can add a lacing of white to the lofty summits. In clear, tranquil turquoise-hued lakes watery reflections of pale pinnacles and autumn-hued trees linger.

The Dolomites are often called “the Pale Mountains” due to the mixture of minerals in the rock that give them their
distinctive light gray color. At sunrise the morning light sweeps the pale sculptural forms with photogenic warm shades of vivid oranges and yellows. At sunset, the rock is imbued with the rosy blush of alpenglow.

We have ten full days to photograph this extraordinary landscape. Lake Carezza at sunrise creates an iconic image. Here, reflections of rugged sunlight-swept mountains soar loftily over tall green pines that frame the gem-like quiet waters. At over 22 square miles, the Alpe di Siusi is the largest alpine plateau in Europe where panoramic landscapes appear at every turn of the road. We look for the ethereal early morning fog as it filters into deep valleys surrounded by a towering grand mountainscape. In Val di Funes, the charming small churches of Santa Maddalena and St. Johann sit gracefully in wide meadows while mountains soar above— and iconic images beckon. Enchanting Lago di Braies, the “Pearl of the Dolomites,” lies nestled among sheer rock walls. Near the resort town of Cortina d’Ampezzo, we have two full days for photography. Grand scenes captured from high mountain passes, reflections in serene alpine tarns, and the massive rock formations of Cinque Torri fill our days and our lenses. One of the finest photographic highlights of the region, the renowned three peaks of Tre Cime di Lavaredo, provides a dramatic final photo shoot.

The Dolomites are truly unique among mountain chains around the world. The sheer rock walls rising abruptly well over 5,000 feet are some of the highest to be found anywhere. Commanding mountain massifs form sweeping panoramas, while isolated pinnacles tower monumentally high above talus slopes and gradual foothills. In October the vivid contrast of colors created by blue skies, pale rock faces suffused with changing light, golden larches, and rolling green meadows is at its finest. For photographers, the quiet season of autumn in the Dolomites is the perfect time of year.

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**Tour Itinerary**

**Day 1**
Depart from home.

**Day 2 (Oct 10)**
Arrive at the Venice Marco Polo Airport. Meet the group for our 3-hour drive to the village of Carezza in the Dolomites. We stop en route at Val Venegia, a photogenic mountain valley at the foot of the San Martino massif. After checking into our hotel we have time for sunset photography at Lake Carezza and enjoy a welcome dinner in a local restaurant. (D)

**Day 3**
Before breakfast we return to Lake Carezza for a sunrise shoot. Known as the “Rainbow Lake” due to its clear emerald hues, the watery surface often reflects the surrounding dark conifer forest and the towering mountains above. The water level is typically low in autumn and we may spot the submerged statue of Ondina, the nymph who protects the lake—and only one legend in this land of legends.

Following breakfast we drive to the Alpe di Siusi (Seiser Alm), the largest high-altitude mountain plateau in Europe. Our hotel is situated in an expansive alpine meadow at an altitude of nearly 6,000 feet with stunning views in every direction. The majestic peaks Sassolungo and Sasso Piatto rise to over 10,000 feet and we photograph as the warm light of afternoon illuminates the craggy mountains. (BLD)

Day 4
We have a full day to photograph the alpine meadows of Alpe di Siusi. After a hearty breakfast, we are out early hoping to catch the morning mist or low fog as it settles in the mountain valleys. We discover photogenic wooden shepherds' huts perched in green meadows and capture views of the spectacular peaks from different angles. In the afternoon we are again out in time for sunset photography. (BLD)

Day 5
Following sunrise photography and breakfast, we drive northward, stopping en route in the village of Ortisei with its colorful wooden houses. Weather permitting, we take the Seceda cable car to the top of the mountain for spectacular views of the jagged teeth-like pinnacles of the Odles—known as the “White Mountains.”

After we return to Ortisei, we continue our drive into the Val di Funes. We check into our charming family-run hotel located in one of the most scenic areas of the valley. At sunset, we photograph the colorful 18th-century church of St. Johann, sitting perfectly in the midst of a bread meadow with autumn orange-tinged larch forests in the background while the pale peaks of the Geisler mountain group dominate the high backdrop. (BLD)

Day 6
We have a full day to photograph in the Val di Funes. At sunrise we return to St. Johann Church for an early morning shoot. We visit the photogenic church of Santa Maddalena, where Ruefen Mountain rises dramatically above, and St. Jacob Church, one of oldest in the valley. At this time of the year, throughout the Val di Funes, the larch trees should be in golden fall color—to contrast splendidly with the deep greens of conifers and with the light gray rocks of the Dolomites. (BLD)
Day 7
We depart for Brunico and Lago di Braies, one of the most beautiful lakes in all of Italy. Depending on the road conditions, we drive the hairpin turns over Passo delle Erbe, a scenic high mountain pass. A detour takes us to a charming mountain chapel before we reach the main road to Brunico. Sunset photography is at Lago di Braies, followed by dinner at our hotel. (BLD)

Day 8
We return to Lago di Braies for a full day beginning with sunrise photography from the edge of the lake set amidst high mountains. Depending on the light and time of day, the lake can reflect shades of clear emerald greens and turquoise blues. Following breakfast, we have an opportunity to explore the lake by wooden rowboat, to hike the trail around the lake or in a nearby mountain pasture, or to simply enjoy the tranquil setting. (BLD)

Day 9
Following a morning shoot at Lago di Braies and breakfast, we depart for Cortina d'Ampezzo, the "Queen of the Dolomites," nestled in the valley of the Boite River. Cortina is a ski resort town that was host to the 1956 Winter Olympic Games—and one you may recognize from films such as The PinkPanther and For Your Eyes Only. En route we stop to photograph at one of the nearby alpine lakes, Duerrensee or Lake Misurina. Dinner tonight is at our hotel in Cortina. (BLD)

Days 10–11
We have two full days for photography in the stunning region around Cortina. Autumn color highlights swaths of larch forest and early snows may drape the rocky heights. High mountain passes—Passo Giau and Passo Falzarego—offer grand mountain scenics. Weather permitting, we take cable cars to a mountain hut at Lagazuoi, known for its extensive WWI mountain tunnels and/or into the impressive five towers of Cinque Torri. We photograph Tre Cime di Lavarado, one of the most distinctive peaks in the Dolomites. In Cortina, we can stroll the old town streets—or enjoy the ambiance while stopping for an Italian coffee or an Aperol spritz. (BLD)

Day 12 (Oct 20)
Depending on flight times, we may have time for a sunrise shoot before we depart for the Venice airport. (B)
Trip Details

Oct 9 - Oct 20, 2020
Fee: $7,895 from Venice, Italy
Deposit: $800
Limit: 12

TOUR LEADERS

JOHN SHAW
And local leader

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