

SAN ZENO^{di} MONTAGNA



Municipality of San Zeno di Montagna

Cà Montagna n. 11 - 37010 San Zeno di Montagna (VR)

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Inhabitants 1.367 - Altitude 580 m. a.s.l.

Surface 28,27 km² - Distance from Verona 43 km



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1. THE TERRITORY IN HISTORY

San Zeno di Montagna was originally born from a group of well spaced out inhabited pockets today identifiable as the 15 hamlets of: Ca' Montagna, Ca' Schena, Canevoi, Sperane, Capra, Ca' Sartori, Le Tese, Castello, Laguna, Borno, Villanova, La Ca', Pora, Pra' Bestemà.



Starting from the years around 1960 a lot of construction, both tourist and residential structures and barns have been built that in some ways have changed the natural landscape.

The original configuration of the inhabited area consisted of agricultural estates, settlements of medieval origin, developed above all from the XVI to the XVIII centuries. These estates were usually formed by a manor house (today often hardly recognizable) fortified or enriched with important architectural elements, flanked by peasant houses generally with stables on the ground floor and living areas on the upper floor, reachable by external stone staircases and hayloft in the attic. The estates generally had a round arched entrance into which the family emblem or the date of construction was inserted. In each hamlet there was a fountain for the water supply of houses and stables. In various areas of the village, tombs have been found that are supposed to belong to the Roman period. But it's only starting from 1300 that we have written information of the area of San Zeno. One of the oldest documents dated 1321, speaks of a "sindicus" which leased a part of the territory to some notables from Verona. At that time the dominant and probably feudal landowner of the area was the Dal Verme family.

At that time the most important building of artistic and historic importance was built, namely the Ca' Montagna mansion which took its name from the family who built it, the Montagnas.



The building was enlarged and embellished in the 1400s and 1500s. The last heir Zeno died of plague in the epidemic of 1630. The mansion then passed from hand to hand until reaching the Castellani family, from whom the Council purchased it in 1981, then subjecting it to a fine restoration. Even the town's name seems to be related to the Montagna family. In fact from some documents of the time it seems that it was called Montagna di Monte Baldo, a name modified in 1860 in San Zeno di Montagna, in honour of the Saint, whose devotion was then already widespread in the area and on Lake Garda.

At the end of the Della Scale family's rule, San Zeno too became part of The Republic of Venice (1405-1797). Then from 1815 the Austrians took over until 1866, when San Zeno di Montagna also became part of the kingdom of Italy. During the first world war Monte Baldo was a trench line, as evidenced by the nearby Fort of Naole.

San Zeno, due to its strategic position, between Lake Garda and the Adige Valley, experienced very hard years even in the Second World War. Until the second post-war period the inhabitants lived (in the countryside still divided into hamlets) almost exclusively from agriculture and raising livestock.

It was then from the 1960s that tourism made its way among the areas of San Zeno, changing the territory and above all the economy, the tourist industry becoming prevalent in the town.



2. TO SEE

The parish church of San Zeno

stands on a chapel, presumably of Romanesque origin, dedicated to San Zeno.



The parish church of Lumini

(1724) is dedicated to Saint Eurosia.

The Palazzo Ca' Montagna

(Ca' Montagna mansion) is the oldest and most beautiful building of San Zeno di Montagna. The one that, together with the **Parish Church**,



has the greatest historical and artistic importance. It is located

in the hamlet of the same name and which comes from the noble Montagna family. The frescoes that decorate the interior of the building have an extraordinary value both artistic



and historical, as they constitute a unique example in the rural area, of interior decoration with upholstery motifs, taken from city models.

There are numerous **capitals**, sacred pillars and votive crosses, that are images of folk art and the soul of a community. There

are sacred symbols depicting images of the Virgin, of Christ, of the Saints and of religious signs for the protection of crops, votive offerings for the end of plagues and of epidemics that struck animals.



Water and the fountains

The area of San Zeno di Montagna is lacking in water since the large springs are scarce and the watercourses are often dry. All these aspects put together have had an effect on the localisation of settlements and economic activities, making agriculture difficult, which has then been supplanted by breeding and pastoralism.

In the past, families who lived in the hamlets drew water to the fountains, or collected rainwater, which was conveyed into a cistern through a network of gutters on the roofs which was subsequently fished out with a bucket. The fountains that served as a wash-house and a drinking trough for the animals were built in stone and generally with several basins, each with a specific function. The first called "della canala " was the cleanest. The water came directly from the source and was therefore used for cleaning dishes and tools strictly related to food.

For drinking and cooking the water was taken directly from the "canala"; the jet from where the water came out. The buckets were filled and transported with a pannier with one bucket hanging on each end. The second tank, where the water was clean was used to water the animals. The third bath also called of the "Lissa", the area for soaping, was used to rinse the clothes. The fourth tank was used for washing clothes: here they soaped them, then banged them on slanted stones placed at the edge of the tank and then rinsed them out in the third tank. In some cases the fountains have become real architectural structures, some of which are covered.





The typical malga (*mountain pasture*) of Baldo is located above 1000 metres on both sides of the mountain. It consists of a plot of pastureland with waterholes, some with a stretch of woodland

and characterized by an alpine hut from which rises a typical chimney at one end of the building, meanwhile at the other the wall has a generally rounded shape.



3. FOOD AND WINE

In San Zeno di Montagna you can taste the characteristic products of Mount Baldo such as the flavourful salamis and cheeses. The typical dishes prepared in the restaurants accompany the different seasons of the year and the traditional festivals.



During the chestnut festival the restaurants compete in the presentation of menus based on this special product of the mountains. In particular the tasty chestnut minestrone.

The Chestnuts of San Zeno D.O.P deserve a special mention.

The cultivation of chestnuts in the Baldo area dates back to 1285. The chestnut was initially cultivated on a strip of land between 600 and 900 metres a.s.l. Later, in the nineteenth century, the spread of chestnuts involved both the eastern and western sides of Baldo and in particular San Zeno and its hamlets.

The chestnut represented a basic element of the mountain diet, to be consumed fresh, processed like flour (to make bread or polenta), cooked (under the ashes, boiled or roasted on the grill). But not only: the chestnuts also provided an important resource for feeding the pigs. They were fed the fruit of lesser quality, capable of transmitting a particular taste to the meat. The marketing of chestnuts already took place at the end of the 19th century directly at the weekly market of Caprino Veronese, or at that of Verona.



4. EVENTS AND FOLKLORE

In May the **Festival of flowers** and wild herbs of Baldo in Prada is dedicated to the flora of Monte Baldo.

In July, the **Festa di San Luigi** is celebrated in the characteristic hamlet of Lumini.

On the first Sunday of September, the **religious Festival della Madonna della cintura** (*the Madonna of the Belt*) takes place, followed by the "Senturel", a traditional bocce competition in the streets of the town.

On the 29 September in Prada there is the ancient Livestock Fair, **Fiera del Bestiame di San Michel**, that marks the end of the mountain pasture.

The Chestnut Festival, **La Festa delle castagne**, an exhibition and market of the San Zeno D.O.P chestnuts, takes place between October and November.

5. ITINERARIES

The territory of San Zeno di Montagna is ideal for practicing many sporting activities and in particular, hiking and mountain-biking. From Spring to Autumn the climate is mild and stimulating: tourists of all ages, families and sportsmen can ramble discovering the



most hidden corners of the various hamlets, walking the easy and flat paths shaded in the pine forest where they can also find picnic areas or even going to the peaks of Monte Baldo on more demanding excursions. The relaxing atmosphere, the green of nature and the breathtaking views are the setting for these days in the open air. The chair lifts in the hamlet of Prada make it easy to reach an altitude of 1850m, the starting point of magnificent walks along the Monte Baldo summits to the higher mountains such as Cima Valdritta (2218m) and Cima Telegrafo (2200m) where in the summer there is a rifugio (mountain restaurant) open.

In the Sperane pine forest a health route and the Jungle Adventure park offer a pleasant and exciting alternative for both adults and children.

