

The black gold of Trieste

More coffee is consumed in this Italian city than any other, a legacy of its strategic position on the Adriatic. **Kiki Deere** sets off to get a flavour of its history

The pungent aroma of freshly brewed coffee swirls in the air, filling my nostrils as I cross the threshold of Caffè San Marco, one of Trieste's oldest cafés, where marble tables are supported by cast iron pedestals. Customers line the inlaid wooden counter, repeatedly stirring the sugar in their coffee as the spoons clink against their ceramic espresso cups. Voices are drowned by the gurgling, humming and whistling of the coffee machine that churns out one caffeine-infused beverage after another: caffè macchiato, espresso, cappuccino. The inhabitants of Trieste are said to imbibe twice as much coffee as elsewhere in Italy; statistics indicate the average Italian consumes 5.8kg of coffee a year, while in Trieste this is estimated to be 10kg.

Trieste's love for roasted beans can be traced back to the 18th century during 500 years of Habsburg rule, when Emperor Charles VI made the north-eastern city a free port. Trieste received beans from coffee plantations from around the world to supply coffee houses throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire, most notably in Vienna,

and it was here that some of the most important coffee trades in the Mediterranean were carried out. Coffee drinking became a popular pastime, and historic sites such as Caffè San Marco became the meeting point for intellectuals, writers and politicians to exchange ideas and stimulate their creativity. Irish novelist and poet James Joyce called the city his home for over 10 years – this is where he penned *The Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In the 19th century the coffee machine that churns out one caffeine-infused beverage after another: caffè macchiato, espresso, cappuccino. The inhabitants of Trieste are said to imbibe twice as much coffee as elsewhere in Italy; statistics indicate the average Italian consumes 5.8kg of coffee a year, while in Trieste this is estimated to be 10kg.

My guide Paola and I stroll Trieste's seafront, lined with pastel-coloured Neoclassical buildings that are a reminder of the city's Austro-Hungarian past. Empress Maria Theresa invested heavily in the city, constructing grand buildings, impressive piazzas and boulevards for the Habsburg Empire's only seaport. We walk past the shell-pink Old Stock Exchange Palace, with its Doric columns and early 19th-century gable clock. Between 1755 and 1844 these were the headquarters of international trade, crucial for the economic development of the city and the coffee trade.

We drive past the city's sprawling port that stretches out into the Adriatic. Strategically located mid-way between the Suez Canal and the Strait of Gibraltar, the port of Trieste became the crossroads for ships arriving from the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic. More than two million coffee sacks are



shipped here every year, of which a whopping 350,000 are delivered to the warehouse of Illy, the city's most renowned coffee brand. Founded by Francesco Illy in 1933, the coffee roasting company processes 100 tons of coffee every day. At its vast factory on the southern outskirts of the city, green beans are roasted and transformed into the much-prized Illy blend before being shipped all over the world.

Lining the Illy factory are neat and tidy rows of white and red flowers that echo the brand's signature colours. We are greeted by Moreno Faina, director of the University of Coffee. "Coffee?" he offers, as he ushers us past the reception area into the foyer. It would be rude not to. I sip my espresso at the bar with dozens of designer coffee cups swirling above in a modernist work of art.

We tour the premises, where I learn that Illy produces a delicate, aromatic blend of nine different Arabica coffees. The building is home to advanced research labs and the University of Coffee aims to educate students about coffee culture and knowledge, from history to chemistry and biology (aficionados can embark on a master's degree in economics and coffee sciences).

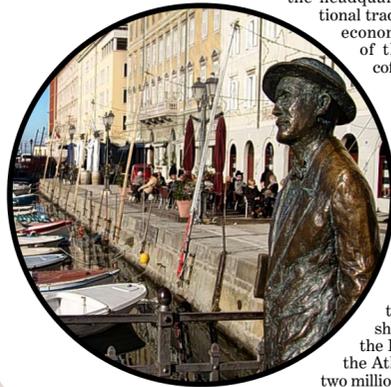
We are escorted to the canister production department where machinery roars with energy, packaging ground coffee into pressurised recyclable cans that trap the coffee's aromas for about a year, or until they are opened.

Illy is undoubtedly Trieste's best-known brand, but the city is home to nearly a dozen independent *torrefazioni*, or micro-roasters. We later visit the much

smaller Guatemala, run by a husband and wife team, which opened in 1980. At its coffee shop, assistants can tailor blends according to personal preferences. Trieste is one of the world's very few cities where to this day beans are roasted to order.

We end our tour at the Caffè degli Specchi, in the heart of Trieste's grandiose Piazza Unità d'Italia. We sit at one of the tables that spill out onto the square, and I learn that Trieste even has its own coffee terminology: if you order a cappuccino you are served a caffè macchiato (an espresso with milk); you need to ask for a caffè latte (coffee with milk) instead. I sip my velvety coffee, marveling at how intricately linked the city's history is with coffee, the world's second most valuable commodity after oil.

Full of beans: café culture on the city's waterfront (above); Caffè San Marco (insets right); statue of James Joyce on the harbour side (inset left) ALAMY



Travel Unravelled



How long for a three-country trip to South America?

Q'm keen to do a trip to Peru, Colombia, Ecuador and the Galápagos in one go. Is that feasible?
Russ Williams

A So long as you have plenty of time, a trip taking in these locations is both easily achievable and highly rewarding. However, if you try to rush the journey it could end up being frustrating – especially since not every aspect of travel runs as smoothly as it might in South America.

The two ends of the ideal journey are the impressive Spanish colonial city of Cartagena, on Colombia's Caribbean coast, and Lake Titicaca (above) on the Peru/Bolivia border. There are beaches and islands along the shore to the east and west of Cartagena; go east, and you can also trek in the Sierra Nevada.

Bogota, Colombia's capital, is much safer than it used to be. Besides its historic charm and excellent museums, it is a handy base for excursions to places such as the salt cathedral of Zipaquirá. I recommend a flight to southern Colombia (much safer than the road journey), crossing the Ecuadorian border and calling in at the entertaining Ciudad Mitad del Mundo ("Middle of the World City") just north of the lovely capital, Quito. The Galápagos lie about 1,500 miles off the coast of Ecuador, and you can fly from Quito for around £150. Spend time on the main island as well as aboard a cruise ship, appreciating the land and seascapes, and diverse wildlife.

Fly to Guayaquil, a gritty port city turned colourful cultural hub. Then aim south into Peru. Lima is worth 48 hours, but the main draw is Cusco, the Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu. The Inca Trail rewards the extreme effort it requires. Many people simply fly back from Cusco, but extending your stay allows you to make the fascinating journey to Puno, the main city on Lake Titicaca, and then exit Peru for the Bolivian capital, La Paz, via the wild and austere Altiplano.

In terms of international flights: the easiest solution is an "open jaw" itinerary from Heathrow – either on American Airlines via Miami or, if you prefer to avoid US border controls, the Colombian airline, Avianca. The trip looks to me like a minimum of a month, and six weeks would be better. If you simply can't make that sort of time, then it splits neatly into two: Colombia and Ecuador (into Cartagena, out of Guayaquil) and Peru and Bolivia (into Lima, out of La Paz).

Simon Calder

Travel essentials

GETTING THERE

Ryanair (0871 246 0000; ryanair.com) flies from Stansted to Trieste.

VISITING THERE

Illy University of Coffee (unicaffe.it) offers a half-day course with a factory tour for €475pp (£350). Caffè San Marco: caffesanmarcotrieste.eu Caffè degli Specchi: caffespechi.it

MORE INFORMATION

Friuli Venezia Giulia Tourist Board: turismofvg.it