## **Spiritual San Romedio Sanctuary**

In the heart of Trentino, in the Val di Non valley, there is a place steeped in spirituality: the Sanctuary of San Romedio. The monastery, which rises imposingly in a forest, has become famous for its beauty but, like any respectable ancient place, it too lives suspended between legend and history. The story tells of Romedio of Thaur who, wanting to go to Trento to say farewell to his bishop Vigilio and to receive his last blessing, asked one of his disciples to saddle his horse. The latter, however, ran back terrified, saying that a bear was tearing it to pieces. At which the old hermit, already in an odour of sanctity, did not get upset and said to the disciple: "Then bridle the bear". The disciple, who blindly trusted Romedius, went back and, although with due hesitation, approached the bridle to the animal who miraculously obeyed, bowing his big head and allowing himself to be saddled quietly. The Saint thus trotted into Trento astride the bear.

In memory of this legendary story, since the end of the 1950s the sanctuary regularly hosts a bear in semi-freedom, at the initiative of the then senator, Count Gian Giacomo Gallarati Scotti, honorary member of the WWF foundation committee in Italy, who saved a plantigrade destined to be culled to donate it for the first time to the sanctuary. Since then, the fauna area ofthe sanctuary of San Romedio has given shelter to many specimens of brown bear coming from Trentino and beyond.

Built on a 70-meter-high limestone cliff and immersed in a splendid natural setting, the architectural complex that was gradually developed over time consists of a series of churches and chapels. The oldest chapel in the building dates back to the 11th century. Over the centuries three other small churches, two chapels and seven shrines of the Passion were erected. Characteristic of the complex is the steep staircase of 131 steps that connects the various levels. The sanctuary is now kept by the friars of the Order of St. Francis of Assisi and is a pilgrims’ destination, visited annually by over 200,000 travellers, including those who follow the "Jacopeo d'Anaunia" journey of faith. The 170 km long pilgrimage is generally completed in a week, or in three days on the shorter version, circularly crossing the Val di Non through villages, woods and streams, starting and ending in Sanzeno and includes a visit to the Sanctuary and to the Basilica SS. Martiri cathedral as a central stop.