



Südtiroler Archäologiemuseum  
Museo Archeologico dell'Alto Adige  
South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology



Landesmuseen Südtirol  
Musei provinciali Alto Adige  
Museums provinciai

## Press information

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## 25 Years of the South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology – A Success Story

**On 28 March 2023 the South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology will celebrate its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Bolzano's Via Museo. Every year the permanent exhibition attracts just about 300,000 visitors from around the world who come to see Ötzi the Iceman and his unique belongings.**

**“The museum has become an important cultural attraction in South Tyrol. This is reflected by constant interest from the public and an increasing number of yearly visitors due to ongoing, exciting research and mediation”, said Arno Kompatscher, governor and museum councilor of South Tyrol.**

### **How it all started**

The one-of-a-kind Copper Age site was discovered by the German couple Erika and Helmut Simon on 19 September 1991 while they were hiking on Tisenjoch. This discovery was the deciding event for establishing a provincial museum for archaeology in South Tyrol. The province found a suitable location in what was formerly an Austro-Hungarian bank built in 1905 in Bolzano's Via Museo. Ownership was transferred from the Italian state to the province of South Tyrol in the 1980s. In 1996 renovation work began. The original structure was largely retained including elements of neo-baroque and art nouveau styles.

## **25 years ago**

“The moment when the mummy was brought into the museum with a police escort was very special and all the employees were very moved”, Angelika Fleckinger remembers, as an employee from the very beginning. “Back then we already suspected that the museum would attract many people, but the fact that it continues to break records 25 years later is quite remarkable.”

The museum opened to the public for the first time on 28 March 1998. The permanent exhibition presented a chronological sequence from the Paleolithic to the Middle Ages and followed modern principles of exhibition design. The “Iceman” find, including the mummy and his belongings, occupied an entire floor of the building.

Ötzi, as the mummy is widely known, is housed in a one-of-a-kind refrigeration cell that was specially constructed for him. Visitors can view him through a small window that looks into this cell.

## **Today**

Archaeologist and marketing expert, Elisabeth Vallazza, has been director of the South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology since November 2022 when the long-standing director Angelika Fleckinger became the head of provincial museums.

In 2011, 20 years after Ötzi was discovered, museum leadership was prompted to expand the permanent exhibition on the Iceman due to the abundance of research findings and constant worldwide interest from both the media and the public. The new permanent exhibition brings together the most striking discoveries, experiences, and events related to the Iceman and has expanded to cover three floors. Simultaneously, a new lifelike reconstruction of Ötzi was unveiled, made by the Dutch paleo artists Alfons and Adrie Kennis. Since then, it has given the Iceman his world-famous face.

The third floor of the museum is used for temporary archaeological exhibitions or offers visitors a place to relax (The Lounge).

The permanent exhibition on the Iceman is constantly being updated as more knowledge is gathered. It now has new original finds from Ötzi’s time (the Copper Age), findings from the latest research on mummies, and exciting objects from the field of glacier archaeology. New, interactive stations allow visitors to experience the museum’s content with all their senses.

## **A new building**

After 25 years with visitor numbers significantly increasing, the museum reaches its maximum capacity in many months of the year. A location analysis completed in 2021 highlighted the Villa Gasteiger (Ex-Enel) area in Bolzano’s Via Dante as a potential new site. Recently Governor Kompatscher announced the provincial government’s decision in favor of this location.

The area stands out because it is easy to reach and close to the city center. Villa Gasteiger is a protected monument that could be adapted as the new seat of the South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology with a few modern additions.

“We see a lot of potential in the chosen area”, said director of the museum, Elisabeth Vallazza. “It offers enough space for a forward-looking architectural solution, and we are excited to have ample space for exhibitions and visitors alike.”

### **Museum visitors and their importance for South Tyrol**

Since it opened in 1998, the South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology has noted constant public interest that has continued to increase. With just shy of 300,000 visitors in a year the structure has an impressive record to show. In 2022 the museum topped 6 million total visitors. Despite reservation options, long lines still form on many days of the year. The building has the capacity to hold 300 people, but if this number is reached, access must be limited.

Origin: Museum guests come from all over Europe and from every continent. In the year before the pandemic (2019) 42% of people came from Germany, 27% from Italy (not including South Tyrol), 5% from South Tyrol, 6% from Austria, 14% from the rest of Europe, and 6% from the rest of the world. After the pandemic subsided visitors immediately reached record numbers once again, and 2023 also promises to set new records.

### **Museum research activity**

The museum and its research activities are supported by two advisory boards with a total of ten experts from a wide variety of disciplines. Two external preservation specialists are responsible for the Iceman’s mummy. Ten research projects are currently running or are about to be published in the fields of archaeology, archaeometallurgy, microbiology, molecular biology, medicine, dendrochronology and carbon dating.

### **Special activities of the museum**

In the last 25 years the museum has organized sixteen **special exhibitions** related to archaeology. International cooperation and preservation projects made it possible for the museum in Bolzano to present two important international mummy exhibitions in their cultural context: in 2006 “Chachapoya – The Secret of the Cloud People” in cooperation with the archaeology museum in Leymebamba (Peru) and the Austrian Ministry of Culture, and in 2009 in cooperation with the Reiss-Engelhorn Museums in Mannheim (Germany) the exhibition “Mummies – The Dream of Everlasting Life”.

“**Back to the Stone Age**”: every two years the South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology organizes an open-air festival for experimental archaeology in the Talvera Meadows in Bolzano. International experts demonstrate their knowledge and skills in archaeo-technology. Visitors can also try their hand with materials and crafting techniques from historical times.

### **Images**

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