

Discover THE DOLOMITES

These soaring South Tyrolean peaks are a playground for skiers, mountain bikers and hikers. Throw in superb dining and spas, and your stay can be as active – or indulgent – as you wish

Whatever time of year you travel, as you weave your way north from Venice airport, the mountains take on a rosy hue – geological proof you're on your way to the Dolomites. These mighty slabs of rock stand sentry over postcard-worthy valleys, dotted with wooden chalets and the odd bulb-domed church. It may look like Austria, but that is the charm of Italy's northernmost region: neither Austrian nor entirely Italian, it has a cultural identity of

its own. Many locals speak Ladin, as well as German and Italian, and Ladin cuisine and milkmaid-style dress are much in evidence.

WINTER THRILLS

At the heart of the ski area, the Sella Ronda links 500 kilometres of pistes around the Sella massif, a UNESCO World Heritage site. The circuit loops resorts such as chic Corvara, lively Selva in Val Gardena, quieter Canazei or altitudinal Arabba by Marmolada Glacier. There are also 1,800 kilometres of cross-country ski trails,

while wooded slopes and snowy plateaux lure snowshoers.

SUMMER ADVENTURE

Once the snow has melted, the cable cars and chairlifts serve hikers keen to explore the 400 kilometres of trails. At the top of the Piz Sorega chairlift in San Cassiano, try out the free outdoor gym and Kneipp baths. The terrain tempts mountain bikers too, with graded routes, while a hack on a horse is a great way to see the landscape; call the Teresa Equestrian Centre in Badia.

WHERE TO STAY

THE PLACE TO BE

Lagació Mountain Residence, Strada Micurà de Rù 48, San Cassiano, Alta Badia, 0039 0471 849503, lagacio.com.

This hotel comprises 24 apartments sleeping two to five. The decor is sleek with an emphasis on natural, locally sourced materials and the staff are particularly helpful. At the buffet breakfast you'll find everything from smoothies to eggs cooked to order. The La Palsa spa also has a sauna and Turkish baths. Apartments for two from €200 b&b.