



Top of the RANGE

Cosy nights by a cabin fire, world-class skiing and Michelin starred dining, all atop the dizzying heights of Italy's South Tyrol

“Keep me fed, keep me warm and I’m happy” has long been my mantra when it comes to relationships. It’s comfortingly low-maintenance, but as my partner can attest to, I turn pretty cranky pretty quickly when I’m cold. With this in mind, you might understand why five days in the Italian Dolomites was enough to give me pause. Famed for snow-capped mountains and world-class skiing, it isn’t exactly a sun-worshipper’s idea of paradise. Nonetheless, I packed a suitcase complete with snow boots, my North Face sweater, my industrial sized gloves and of course a few pairs of trusty thermals.

As I arrived in Alta Badia, however, my reservations melted away. The air, though crisp, was thoroughly refreshing and the sun still glorious and strong. Our room at the intimate Rosa Alpina Hotel & Spa – a Relais & Châteaux luxury hotel – felt less like hotel accommodation and more like a secluded cabin in the mountains. The alpine décor mixed with the simply breathtaking surroundings made Rosa Alpina one of

the most romantic hotels I’ve had the pleasure of staying in.

Given the secluded location, one might expect standard fare when it comes to food, but Rosa Alpina’s two Michelin-starred St Hubertus restaurant was both surprising and delightful. From celebrated chef Norbert Niederkofler to the skilful sommelier, every member of staff was an expert in the field – and the food, of course, both looked and tasted amazing. Course after course exceeded the one before it. The Sicilian red shrimps on porcini mushroom royale set the bar dizzyingly high. The risotto with braised white onions that followed was a perfect balance of flavours while the melt-in-the-mouth Mediterranean seabass with olive oil cream was one of the best dishes I have tasted. Topping it off with a tarte tatin of alto adige apples and freshly whipped vanilla ice cream was a perfect ending to the meal.

Everything at the Alpina radiates an air of understated luxury and we were happy to while

away the evening on its sumptuous sofas, coffee and chocolates available in abundance.

The following day was spent taking in the stunning mountain views of the surrounding area. Whether you want to try skiing (mid-December to mid-March) or hiking during the rest of the year, the Dolomites will inspire and delight. Designated a UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site since 2009, these beautiful mountain valleys offer world-class skiing and stunning views set among some of the best gourmet restaurants on the continent. The area’s dedication to fine food means you can take a break and eat Michelin starred food at as many as eleven traditional mountain huts.

Following a day of hiking and relaxing, we journeyed from Alta Badia onto Val Gardena, a slightly buzzier area that boasted just as much beauty as its predecessor. Relais & Châteaux’s Gardena Grödnerhof hotel, also with its own Michelin restaurant, the Anna Stuben, provided the perfect base for continuing to explore our sprawling surroundings. We spent a day hiking in Alpe di Siusi, Europe’s largest high-altitude meadow. It was so beautiful it made The Sound of Music look like South London.

We rounded up the day with an indulgent

massage at Gardena Grödnerhof’s spa. A treatment here will leave you feeling languorously indulgent. Book a treatment close to the end of the day as you will barely muster the will to move, let alone venture outside the hotel. Luckily for us, the Anna Stuben restaurant provided a quiet haven just a few floors down from our room. Once again, we enjoyed a luxurious meal complemented by wonderful and attentive service.

Later on during our decadent trip, we stopped off for a drink at the Alpina Dolomites, Gardena Health Lodge & Spa. This nature-inspired icon of a building is certainly pricey, but the jaw-dropping view (available from every single room) is the stuff of millionaires and dreams – the ultimate in honeymoon luxury. If your budget can’t quite stretch to a stay in this Shangri-La, make sure you stop by for drink if only to appreciate the view.

At the end of another day wandering in the delicious mountain air, we finished off our trip with a visit to the traditional Tubladel

ON A TYROL

South Tyrol has... 17,000 km of walking and hiking trails, 13,000 of them natural ones, 600 km of valley cycle paths, 400 castles, manor houses and noble country houses, of which 150 can be visited, 80 museums.

You’ll need... good walking shoes and some practical clothes, but don’t compromise on the pretty stuff. It’s not nearly as cold as you might think so ditch the thermals and pack La Perla instead.

If you aren’t comfortable... with nudity, tell your masseuse beforehand that you would prefer not to be topless. The Tyroleans think nothing of a bit of nudity and you’re likely to find that towel whipped off you if you don’t vocalise your preference.

restaurant in Ortisei. Full of friendly locals and charming staff, this was a lovely, laidback way to spend the evening.

You may have heard people talk about the effects of the mountain air, but it really is something special. It gets into your bones, eases away your troubles and refreshes your soul. Yes, lazing on a beach is nice but if you want to do something different first, try South Tyrol, the perfect parallel to a lazy beach honeymoon.

“Alpe di Siusi was so beautiful to behold, it made The Sound of Music look like South London in comparison”

GETTING THERE

Fly into Verona or Innsbruck (British Airways; from £86 return; ba.com, 0844 4930787) and hire a car for the 2-hour drive to the Dolomites. Alternatively, book a fully inclusive package to Val Gardena with Crystalsummer w: crystalsummer.co.uk, altabadia.org, valgardena.it

WHERE TO STAY

Hotel & Spa Rosa Alpina
From €340 per night (approx. £270)
t: +39 0471 84 95 00
w: rosalpina.it

Gardena Grödnerhof
From €214 per night

(approx. £170)
t: +39 0471 79 63 15
w: gardena.it

Book via Relais & Châteaux
Ask for details on the Honeymoon package for an extra dose of indulgence.
t: 00 800 2000 00 02
w: relaischateaux.com

