

20 foodie reasons to visit The Italian Dolomites

Stunning scenery, fresh local produce and more Michelin-starred restaurants than you can shake a ski pole at make this corner of the Italian Alps perfect for food lovers all year round

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The Dolomites provide a popular skiing and hiking destination near the Austrian border in north-east Italy. Spanning regions such as South Tyrol, Trentino and Belluno, it has a typical Alpine climate – warm summer temperatures of up to 25°C, with a ski season from Christmas to early March. Much of the region belonged to Austria before 1914 so German is widely spoken and, in isolated valleys such as Alta Badia, you can hear the ancient 'Ladino' language. Foods are similarly influenced, with a mix of Austrian and Italian dishes often offered on the same menu.

1 Brilliant beer A day's skiing or hiking can soon work up a thirst, so order Forst, a crisp light beer, brewed in the South Tyrol with local spring water.

2 Traditional bread Long winters have led to a variety of inventive ways of preserving food. Puccia secca, a crunchy flatbread, was traditionally air-dried in the lofts of mountain lodges and is still made in the region today.



3 Pork specialities

Ski or hike to lunch at Rifugio Scotoni. The mixed grill of pork ribs, sausages and pork neck (£27) is worth trying, or go for a bowl of paniccia, a pearl barley soup with smoked pork (00 39 0471 847330).

4 Fine dining

The Alta Badia valley has the highest concentration of Michelin-starred restaurants in the Alps. Book into La Siriola in San Cassiano (00 39 0471 849445, siriola.siriolagroup.it) for a chic dining experience, Lech da Sompunt in Pedraces (00 39 0471 847015; lechdasompunt.it) for traditional dishes or, if you prefer pasta, try Stria in Colfosco (00 39 0471 836620).

5 Retail therapy Visit the Co-operativa food hall for foodie treats at bargain prices, from borlotti beans and wild strawberries to porcini and pasta. The kitchenware department also sells covetable coffee pots and crockery. Corso Italia 40 (00 39 0436 861245).

6 Wicked wines

Sassicaia Cabernet Sauvignon is one of the most sought-after fine wines in the world. Try it at Hotel La Perla's Michelin-starred Stüa de Michil. Arturo Spicocchi's tasting menu starts at £50pp without wine – expect local ingredients with a Spanish influence. Strada Col Alt 105, Corvara (00 39 0471 831000, hotel-laperla.it).

7 The smart set

Cortina d'Ampezzo is a haven of designer boutiques. Join the fur-clad locals for some old-school glamour and people-watching on the terrace of the Hôtel de la Poste and order a winter version of the classic Bellini, with tangerine juice in place of peach nectar. Piazza Roma 14, Cortina (00 39 0436 4271).

8 Local cheeses

Sample local cheese, milk and speck (smoked cured ham) before you buy at Luch da P'cëi, a combination of dairy farm, B&B (doubles from £156) and shop. Try San Luca, a creamy, semi-soft cheese, or the yeasty Birra – both are made on the premises. Strada Pecei 17, San Cassiano (00 39 0471 849 286; luchdapcei.it).

9 Alpine cake

The region's Austrian influence is obvious from the local cake specialities. Head to the hotel Ütia de Börz (passodelleerbe.it) situated in a beautiful Alpine pass, and try Buchweizenkuchen, made from buckwheat flower, or Linzertorte, made from almonds, both filled with local redcurrant preserve.



14 Cookery lesson

Traditional cuisine is very much alive in Ladino-speaking areas and typical dishes include turtres (fried cabbage and ricotta) or paniccia, a barley soup. Ladino-style cookery courses (£8) are held once a week on a farm at San Leonardo. Reserve your place at any Alta Badia tourist office (altabadia.org).

10 Cocktail hour

Visit Ciasa Antersies' dining room-cum-art gallery (Italian artist Luigi Veronesi donated the paintings) and try a Spritz Aperol made with prosecco, sparkling water and Aperol (red vermouth). Via Soplà 12, San Cassiano (00 39 0471 849417).

11 Italian-style tapas

The unadorned frontage of Enoteca Cortina conceals a treasure trove of fine wines and the shop doubles as a stop-off for an aperitivo (drink and snack). Have a glass of Franciacorta Bellavista Grand Cuvee Brut (many Italians rate it above Champagne) and some tramezzini (small sandwiches filled with egg and asparagus or tuna and capers). Via dei Marangoni 59, Cortina d'Ampezzo (00 39 0436 3048).

12 Dumpling dishes

The ubiquitous dumpling pops up all over the region – fried, boiled and steamed. At Ütia de Böz you can order knödel (bread dumplings) made with speck (smoked cured ham) and served in a broth, or cheese dumplings served with butter. Wash down with a Genziana grappa, reputed to cure all ills (or, at least, numb the pain). Ütia de Böz, Antermoia 58, San Martino (0039 0474 520066; passodelleerbe.it).



13 Fresh apples

The South Tyrol is perfect apple growing country, producing a tenth of Europe's entire harvest. Try them in a furtaies de pom (a kind of sweet apple fritter served with sugar and custard).

Getting there British Airways flies to Innsbruck from London Gatwick with return fares starting at £79 including taxes. For more details visit ba.com or call 0870 850 9850.

15 Summer picnic

During the milder months go for a hike followed by lunch al fresco. The Hotel Rosa Alpina can arrange to have a



picnic or barbecue with drinks waiting for you at its chalet. And if you drink too much grappa, take the short cut home by cable car (see 18 for address).

16 Delicious desserts

Get a genuine Italian ice-cream hit from Pasticceria Gelateria Lovat, at £1.40 a cornet. For a more wintry feel, try a slice of homemade pine nut cheesecake (£1.90) and Viennese coffee, made with chocolate, whipped cream and cinnamon (£2). Corso Italia 65, Cortina (00 39 0436 3307).

17 Winter warmers

Drink as the locals do by ordering a glass of vin brûlé (wine with brown sugar, lemon and cloves) at the bar, or try a Bombardino (a mixture of advocaat, coffee and whisky topped with whipped cream). Guaranteed to thaw out any chills.



18 Spectacular views

Behind the chocolate-box exterior of the Rosa Alpina Hotel & Spa is a foodie paradise where, in the Michelin-starred restaurant St Hubertus, chef Norbert Niederkofler creates his signature dish of beef cooked in a salt crust and mountain hay. Try the eight-course tasting menu where dishes such as local trout in mountain herb broth with potato and chive purée or ravioli of duck with ragout of asparagus are matched with local wines, such as Gewürztraminer and pinot nero. For something more casual there's a small Fondue Stube (living room) serving meat and cheese fondue. Décor features local wood and linen, and bedrooms have balconies with spectacular views. Strada Micura de Rù, San Cassiano (00 39 0471 849500; rosalpina.it). Original Travel (0207 978 7333; originaltravel.co.uk) offers seven nights at the Rosa Alpina, from £810pp in a double room, including return flights with GB Airways and car hire.



19 Sweet pancakes The definitive dessert of the region is the Kaiserschmarrn, a kind of caramelised pancake filled with rum-soaked raisins and served with apple or plum sauce.

20 Great porcini

The Alta Badia valley is famous for its porcini mushrooms and dried porcini are available all year round at really affordable prices. You can buy permits to pick fresh porcini under strict conditions from the local tourist office (altabadia.org) during the August-September season or, better still, avoid picking toadstools and pay £4 for a guide. Details from the Hotel Rosa Alpina (see 18).