

A resort for all seasons

SARAH MODLOCK DISCOVERS HEAVEN IN THE ITALIAN DOLOMITES - JUST DON'T TELL ANYBODY ABOUT IT

Rosa Alpina Hotel: an idyllic mountain hideaway surrounded by the wild natural beauty of the Dolomites

In an ideal world, places like Rosa Alpina would be kept secret. They would exist as playgrounds for the sybaritic few. Honesty (not to mention that I'm a journalist, and thus do it for a living) compels me to share this glorious alpine treasure.

Nestled in South Tyrol, best known for its majestic pink Dolomite mountains, the six beautiful villages which make up the Alta Badia region - Corvara, Colfosco, La Villa, San Cassiano, Pedrares and La Val - offer some of the world's finest skiing. Dolomiti Superski is the world's largest ski network comprising 740 miles of pistes and 460 lifts. Skiers also come here for the Sella Ronda, a 16-mile, five-hour, circular tour around the dramatic Sella Massif Peak, featuring a series of ski-lifts and downhill runs. Snow is guaranteed on 90% of the slopes and the sun shines for at least eight days out of ten.

With chocolate-box-pretty scenery, around 40 miles of signposted walks and as much to do in summer as in winter, it's easy to see why Brits are starting to visit all year round.

Originally on the front line between the Italian and Austrian armies in World War I, San Cassiano draws cultural influences from both countries. With a 17th Century church, pavement cafes, and traditional

houses with their steeply-sloped roofs, its natural, old-fashioned charm furls around you like a cashmere blanket.

At the heart of the village, the foundations of the hotel Rosa Alpina, were laid in 1850 by the Pizzinini family, who still own and run it now. Something of

a legendary clan in these parts, the Pizzininis also installed the village's first telephone in 1952 and built the first ski lift in 1957.

The family's dedication to their beautiful hotel is just as strong. There are individual, elegant touches everywhere you look in this honey-stone hideaway, from reception to dining rooms, bedrooms and even hallways, which are filled with old family photographs. In the basement, a gym and pool sit alongside the conservatory-style relaxation room, steam room and sauna. The spa (reviewed in last month's issue) provides a menu of luxurious limb-soothing treats.

But regardless of season, whether you're skiing or walking, you will find that it's the sport of eating which really captures the alpine spirit. Rosa Alpina has four lovely restaurants. Its chic wine bar and grill specialises in local fare that the Ladinians - whose local language evolved from the Latin brought by conquering Roman soldiers - have been eating for centuries. Even more 'modern' treats, including luscious pizzas, are not to be missed. There is also a

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lounge bar, guest dining room and fondue restaurant.

Alta Badia is something of a Michelin-star magnet, with three restaurants currently bearing the illustrious rating. Incredibly, this amounts to one for every 1300 of the populace. San Cassiano boasts the Sirlola at Hotel Ciasa Salares and Stüa de Michil at Hotel La Perla can be found in Corvara. But it is St Hubertus at Rosa Alpina which, in particular, is recognised as one of Italy's best restaurants and counts Prince Albert of Monaco and George Clooney among its many celebrity fans. As we go to press, I hear that it has won a second, coveted - and richly deserved - Michelin star.

According to Head Chef Norbert Niederkofler, "the simple things in life are the most beautiful". He prides himself on delivering traditional dishes and flavours - many from the area's ancient Ladin culture - using the finest modern techniques and adding unique twists. The result is both simple and refined.

Each menu is crafted around the best seasonal and local ingredients: trout from nearby rivers poached in a mountain herbal broth with potato and chive purée; meadow-fed lamb from the Badia valley; and strudel of local deer smoked with braised baby onions and elderberry sauce. If you cannot choose which dish to have there is a simple solution: the five-course tasting menu. You can burn off the calorific guilt in the mountains the next day.

In warmer months, the Pizzininis open their mountain cabin for barbecues and lunches. Perched amid velvety green hills carpeted in stunning wild flowers of every hue, it's hard to imagine a better spot to eat fresh gnocchi and drink great wine.

There are not many good reasons to leave the hotel or even the valley but if you want to venture out then Venice is a two-and-a-half-hour drive to the south and Innsbruck is just over the mountaintops in Austria. Perhaps the best-known resort in this historic region is Cortina D'Ampezzo. Here, wealthy locals shop and eat against the backdrop of the original *Pink Panther* movie, starring David Niven. Duck off the main street and head for Enoteca Cortina, a bar on Via dei Marangoni which will provide delicious wine, a light lunch and as much local charm as you can handle. ■ www.rosaalpina.it.

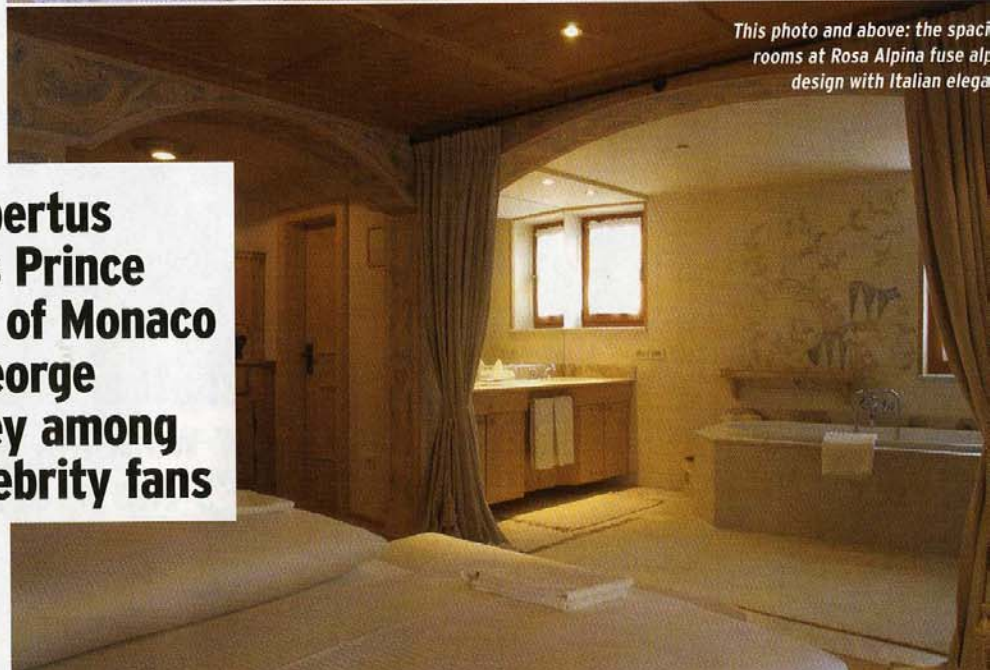
Original Travel offers seven nights at Hotel Rosa Alpina, San Cassiano, from £590pp in a double room, including return flights with GB Airways and car hire. For reservations call Original Travel on 0207 978 7333 or visit www.originaltravel.co.uk.

British Airways operates eight flights a week to Innsbruck from London Gatwick with one-way fares starting from £39 including taxes. For more details visit ba.com or call 0870 850 9 850

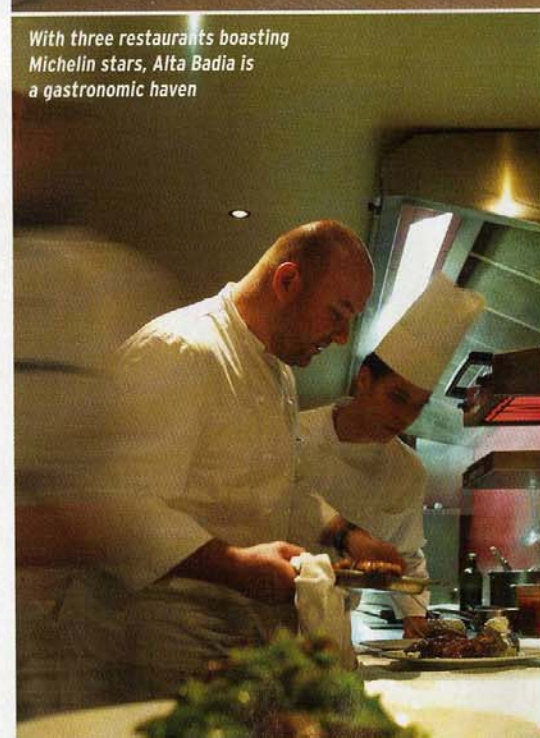
St Hubertus counts Prince Albert of Monaco and George Clooney among its celebrity fans



This photo and above: the spacious rooms at Rosa Alpina fuse alpine design with Italian elegance



With three restaurants boasting Michelin stars, Alta Badia is a gastronomic haven



Rosa Alpina's cosy lounge bar is the perfect place to enjoy a few glasses of Italy's finest wines

