

## Places That Still Matter

# THE ITALIAN DOLOMITES

The 24-mile Sella Ronda circuit is a dream for powder lovers tired of crowds.

BY KELLEY McMILLAN MANLEY



A skier at the Alta Badia resort in the Dolomites

well as *buongiorno*—that stretches from the Swiss border east to Cortina.

In the northeast corner of the loop, Alta Badia has 80 miles of slopes piled with 196 inches of snow a year—about the same as Taos Ski Valley, New Mexico, in 2016. Storms roll in off the Adriatic 120 miles south, dumping light snow on this area of fir forests and the black diamond Gran Risa, host to one of the most prestigious Alpine races each December.

The trails of the Sella Ronda are narrow and, for an experienced skier, not that exciting, which is why it's worth exploring off-piste variations. At Val Mezdi, one of the best out-of-bounds zones, we stare down a powder-filled couloir. Elsewhere, skiers pay thousands to helicopter to virgin lines like this, but in the Dolomites, you take a lift. (Italians hate powder; they'd rather soak in the sun than navigate the fresh stuff.)

**A**top the Biok lift in Alta Badia, a resort in the Dolomites of northeastern Italy, mountain guide Diego Zanesco points to our objective in the distance: the Sella Ronda. The 24-mile intermediate ski circuit circles the Sella massif—a group of limestone peaks crowned by 10,341-foot-tall Piz Boè—winding through four ski resorts, seven centuries-old villages, and four mountain passes.

Here, days start with a cappuccino in one village and end with a *bombardino* (a brandy-infused eggnog shot) in another. In between, there are 4,000-vertical-foot runs and off-piste trails that rival Jackson Hole and Verbier. “It’s skiing the Italian way,” says Zanesco, an energetic 53-year-old who counts world leaders and media moguls as clients, as we kick off.

The Sella Ronda links the four ski resorts of Alta Badia, Arabba, Fassa, and Gardena, delivering more than 310 miles of slopes, 3,000-foot Alpine walls, and 1,500-foot cliffs. Along Italy’s border with Austria, these resorts are the heart of South Tyrol, an autonomous province with Austrian and German influences—*guten Morgen* works as

Lacing down the couloir through what seems like a hidden mountain passageway hundreds of feet tall, we head northwest to Gardena, home to 109 miles of slopes and the Saslong downhill, one of the fiercest speed tracks on the World Cup circuit, and finally to the **Rifugio Emilio Comici** (*Via Plan de Gralba 24; 39-0471/794-121*). The hut is renowned for bringing in daily catches of tuna and scallops—despite its perch at 7,000 feet.

To close the loop, we head back to Alta Badia—home to three Michelin-starred restaurants, the most of any resort in the Alps. At the foot of the resort is **Rosa Alpina** (rooms from \$510; *Strada Micurá de Rù 20; 39-0471/849-500*), a 51-room Relais & Châteaux property that’s been in the Pizzinini family for nearly 80 years. Après-ski options range from deep-tissue massages to six-course dinners at two-star St. Hubertus. Book the three-bedroom Châlet Zeno (from \$6,650), which has a hot tub and personal chef (\$320 per day). “It’s hard not to return,” third-generation owner Hugo Pizzinini says. “Many guests come for the first time and just leave their skis for the next year and the year after that.” ♦

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## Hunting for Vintage Online

The number of outlets for antiques and vintage design keeps on growing. **Everything but the House** (*ebth.com*) deals in personal collections and estate auctions; **Design Market** (*design-mkt.com*) enlists pros to approve 1930s to '90s European pieces from hundreds of global dealers; and the **Modern Archive** (*themodernarchive.com*) sells postmodern gems.