

POWDER, PASTA *and* PINOT

KIKI DEERE GRABS HER SKIS AND DELVES
INTO ALTA BADIA'S LADIN CULTURE IN THE
HEART OF THE ITALIAN DOLOMITES



Left main Lunch with a
view in Alta Badia

Clockwise Views of the
peaks near the Sella Ronda;
La Majun; summer hiking;
cross-country skiing; pasta
making at Utia Bioch; local
Ladin baker Michele; Sommelier
on the Slopes wine tour



THE ALPS • ITALY



IMAGES: ALEX MOLLING,
LA MAJUN, UTIA BIOCH





From left Ladin-inspired cuisine, best enjoyed with a mountain backdrop; slopeside hotel La Perla; the hotel's onsite spa



THE LOWDOWN



How to get there

SkyAlps ([skyalps.com](https://www.skyalps.com)) flies from London Gatwick to Bolzano Airport, with flights operating throughout the winter season. Bolzano Airport is a 1.5-hour drive from the resort of Alta Badia, while Innsbruck Airport is a two-hour drive.

Where to stay

La Perla ([laperlacorvara.it](https://www.laperlacorvara.it)) is a ski-in, ski-out hotel in Corvara, owned and managed by the Costa Family. A member of Leading Hotels of the World, it offers 35 rooms with a strong Ladin heritage, four restaurants including Michelin-starred La Stüa de Michil, an outstanding wine cellar housing 30,000 bottles, and a spa with a heated swimming pool, saunas, a steam room and a Kneipp path (a hydrotherapy circuit, alternating hot and cold).

La Majun ([lamajun.it](https://www.lamajun.it)) is a family-run hotel in the heart of La Villa, offering views of the Lavarela and Sella group. It has an excellent spa with a swimming pool, an open-air hot tub, saunas, a steam room, a Kneipp path and a plunge pool – this is the perfect setting to soothe aching muscles after a long day on the slopes.

What to do

Alta Badia ([altabadia.org](https://www.altabadia.org)) is linked to the Sella Ronda and the **Dolomiti Super Ski**, which offers 1,200 kilometres of runs.

spirits are said to live on in the Dolomites as they await the rebirth of their kingdom. It was this legendary community, along with the misty, otherworldly landscapes that are said to have inspired JRR Tolkien's descriptions of Middle-earth in *Lord of the Rings*.

As I'm cradled up the mountainside, I trace my progress using the MyDolomiti app, confirming my journey against my pre-planned route. The map highlights lifts and mountain huts with Ladin names, and villages are written in both German and Italian. The region's strong Germanic influences stem from centuries of Hapsburg rule, when cultural and linguistic characteristics were assimilated into daily life. More recently, in 1919, following the first world war, South Tyrol was annexed by Italy, with the local population made to adopt Italian culture and German-language schools forced to close. The region was eventually granted autonomous status and self-government in 1972, and it retains a distinct identity today, with a combination of Italian, German and Ladin influences.

For lunch, I stop off at Ütia Bioch – *ütia* being the Ladin word for mountain hut, which were traditionally simple wooden shelters constructed by shepherds to seek refuge while tending to mountain pastures. Over time, many of these shepherd's huts have evolved into stylish restaurants, clad in cosy Alpine decor with wood panelling and open stone fireplaces.

I leaf through the menu, which I soon notice is in Ladin, too. Owner Markus makes suggestions for wine pairings, listed under each dish. "I spend the warmer months of the year hopping from vineyard to vineyard to hunt down my favourite wines," he tells me as he pours me a glass of Kurtatsch, a pinot noir from Mazzon, a low-lying area of eastern South Tyrol known for its long evening sun and cool winds. In the summer, an afternoon breeze blows from Lake Garda that helps the grapes to develop fresh flavours and earthy notes. Markus later gives me a tour of the on-site wine cellar with more than 1,400 labels – an

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extraordinary feat for a restaurant located right on the slopes at more than 2,000 metres above sea level.

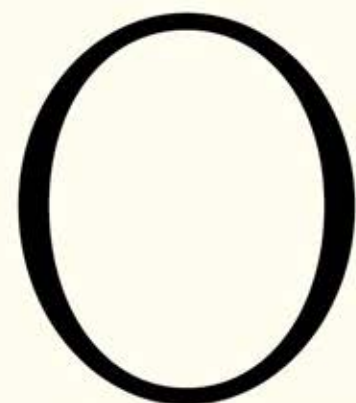
"A great way for guests to sample some of our wines is through Sommelier on the Slopes," Markus says, referring to a wine initiative that involves skiing from hut to hut with a local sommelier and ski instructor to sample wines from around South Tyrol. Ütia Bioch also regularly features in A Taste for Skiing, a foodie programme that this season celebrates its 15th year, and will see renowned chefs partnering with mountain huts to create a signature dish, which is then served throughout the season.

This year, the chosen dish is three Michelin-starred chef Massimiliano Alajmo's *pasta burro e fumo*. It's an exquisite plate of al dente tagliolini with a smoky sauce, parmesan and butter, accompanied by a steaming-hot mug of venison and juniper broth. It comes served on a carved slab of spruce covered in moss – a nod to Ütia Bioch's recent renovation project, which Markus completed with his father, a talented carpenter, using local timber to craft many of the restaurant's furnishings.

IMAGES: ALEXANDER MÜLLER, LA PERLA

Ours glide effortlessly over the snow as we head through a shaded run among towering pine trees. The snow sits heavily on the branches, glinting as dappled light penetrates the dense thicket of forest. Just a few moments later, the slope suddenly opens up, to reveal enormous rock formations jutting into the deep blue sky.

I'm at the ski resort of Alta Badia in the Dolomites mountain range in South Tyrol, northern Italy. Time has eroded the limestone mountains here into jagged pinnacles, precipitous gorges and steep ridges. About 50 million years ago, as the Earth's tectonic plates collided, coral reefs were pushed upwards to form these spectacular peaks. They look particularly striking in winter, their pale rock faces a soft rosy hue and dusted in snow.



I'm skiing a leg of the Sellaronda, a circuit that loops around the Sella Massif, a central range in the Dolomites that rises to 3,152 metres and skirts four valleys: Gardena, Badia, Livinalongo and Fassa. These valleys, along with neighbouring Ampezzo, are part of Ladinia, a region long united by a common cultural and linguistic thread. It's home to a community of about 30,000 people, which has – due to the isolated position of the valleys – retained not only a unique language, but its own cultural traditions and culinary influences.

Joining a chairlift complete with heated seats, I take in the wrap-around views of saw-edged pinnacles, steeped in legends of fairy tales and ogres, dragons and witches. One mythological tale, of the Kingdom of Fanes, tells of the valleys' ancient inhabitants – water nymphs, marmots, princesses and sorcerers whose

From top The Alpine
Ski World Cup; Les
Stües at La Perla; a
suite at La Majun

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lederhosen and waitresses in traditional dress known as *dirndl*, a deep red bodice with ribbons, a blouse, a long skirt and an apron. Specialities served here include *turtres*, fried savoury pies often stuffed with sauerkraut; and *cajinci te ega*, a Ladin favourite of handmade spinach and ricotta ravioli sprinkled with cheese and melted butter. I also try the *puccia*, a roundel of mountain bread made with rye and wheat flour resting on traditional wooden racks. Rye and wheat were originally grown in the surrounding fields, alongside barley and oats, and ground in mills powered by Alpine rivers. Cumin seeds, fennel and *zigoinr* – a type of wild oregano that grows locally – give the bread an earthy aroma.

My next stop is 10 minutes down the road in La Villa, home to Alta Badia's famed Gran Risa, which hosts the Alpine Ski World Cup on its giant slalom ski slope. I overnight at La Majun, a welcoming family-run hotel owned and operated by its third generation of women.

"I was brought up in this very building with my nonna," owner Natalie tells me. "This was once my family home. My grandfather, a blacksmith, died unexpectedly when my grandmother was still young, leaving her to look after their five children all on her own. She was suddenly left with no income and quickly had to think up a way of putting food on the table."

At that time, in the 1960s, the Dolomites was becoming a popular holiday location, largely fuelled by the 1956 Winter Olympics in nearby Cortina d'Ampezzo. This major event sparked a wave of curious hikers and climbers in summer, and intrepid skiers in winter – although it was the mid-1940s that gave birth to ski tourism in Italy more widely, when the country's first ski lift opened in Alta Badia.

"My grandmother strolled over to the hotel up the road and offered to house any additional guests they were unable to accommodate when full. She soon had the odd paying lodger coming to stay, moving the children into the garage to free up our bedroom when a guest would show up. My mother and her siblings would sleep in bunk beds, with nothing more than a small stove to keep them warm," Natalie recounts. Her mother Roberta soon took over the family business, developing it into a 39-room hotel with a chic spa attached. Guests can take a soak in a wooden tub, or visit the two saunas and steam room, before lying back on traditional farmhouse beds in the relaxation area. Treatments include facials and massages using Alpine herbs combined with local pine oil.

I soon learn the Ladins have their own flag, its blue, white and green stripes symbolising the surrounding landscape. Blue represents the sky, white the snow on the mountain peaks, and green the meadows – yet another example of the inescapable interplay between the local population and the surrounding Alpine environment. **B**



IMAGES: ALEX NOLLING, LA MAJUN, LA PERLA

BunnahabhainTM
ISLAY SINGLE MALT SCOTCH WHISKY



HARD TO SAY
EASY TO LOVE
{Bunn-na-ha-venn}

