

BROUGHT TO YOU BY SOUTH TYROL

**Helena Pozniak** breathes in an invigorating mix of crisp, alpine air and warm Mediterranean fragrances in South Tyrol, Italy's hidden surprise

# CAN YOU KEEP A SECRET?

## Colour change

Sunset begins to turn the Dolomite peaks a vibrant red; far right, dining out at altitude is a holiday highlight

**W**ith some 300 sunny days a year, Italy's dazzling South Tyrol offers a warm welcome for visitors. Whether you're on a tranquil break, taking advantage of the region's natural playground or enjoying some of the finest local food and wine in the country, clouds are unlikely to disturb your view. Nestling in the middle of the mighty Dolomites, these are of some of the prettiest mountains and valleys on the continent.

Tucked beside the Austrian border in the northernmost part of Italy, it's where the alpine ambience further north meets the Mediterranean south – a distinctive mix of crisp, pine-scented air, lush meadows and heady southern fragrances.

Italy calls South Tyrol its best-kept secret, not least because it boasts an extraordinary concentration of culinary heavyweights, with more Michelin stars than any other region in Italy – 26 distributed among 19 local restaurants. South Tyrol is rightly proud of its tempting strudel and spinach dumplings, but also offers some of the best of contemporary Italian dishes, enhanced with local flavours of pine nuts or mountain herbs.

## Pale mountains

Known as the pale mountains, the Dolomites of Val Gardena are some of the most craggy and dramatic. Summertime transforms the region into a vast outdoor playground for hikers, cyclists and thrill seekers, and the get-up-and-go views manage to inspire the whole family.

If it's a gentle stroll you're after, you might not stray far from the villages of San Cristina, Ortisei or Selva, perched high above the valley floor. Alpine-style Ortisei in particular is the quintessential chocolate-box village; improbably quaint, with pastel-coloured chalets, ornate porticos and cobbled streets.

Climb higher and you'll be rewarded with lush pastures at a giddy 8,200ft, where spring brings a stunning display of alpine flowers.

For the more bold, these 10,000ft-plus peaks offer some challenging hikes from one shepherd's hut to another and a

far-reaching network of trails, with dramatic traverses punctuated with the odd scramble and via ferrata (iron-ladder climbing path).

## Trail breaks

Described by mountaineer Reinhold Messner as the "most beautiful mountains in the world", they attract visitors who come for the outdoors, many for serious cycling. Val Gardena is regarded as one of the greatest mountain regions.

But if your two-wheeled surface of choice involves more mud and rocks than tarmac, the challenging Sellaronda Mountain Bike Tour is worth the journey to South Tyrol. You can hire a guide along with a bike and head up on cable-cars and ski lifts to reach one of four

Dolomite passes that are on the circular Sella massif route –

Gardena, Campolongo, Pordoi, or Sella. This 36-mile route covers an altitude of 12,200ft, and here all views are 360-degree stunners. Downhill tracks follow single trails, hiking paths and a few roads. But for one day only – on 23 June this year – The Sellaronda Bike Day festival means all roads are reserved for cyclists only from 8:30am-3:30pm.

Whether you're cycling or hiking, many of the best days end with the welcome sight of a wood-gabled cabin in the distance, a warm greeting from the host, a mug of ale and hearty fare made from local eggs, bacon and herbs.

## Burning Dolomites

Did you know that in mid-September the sunset colours the Dolomites bright red? It's a must-see for photographers and hikers



**Imagine your holiday. Live it South Tyrol.** Combine alpine splendour with Mediterranean soul in South Tyrol. To find out more, go to [suedtirool.info/en](http://suedtirool.info/en) and [valgardena.it](http://valgardena.it)

