

Cycling in the Dolomites; Staying at a Spa Hotel

By Peggy Newland

We set off early from Ortisei with bluebird skies, craggy mountains on all sides, and a picnic packed for an Alpe di Suisi all-day jaunt. In hand and on GPS, we have detailed maps from the Adventure Center of Adler Spa Resort Dolomiti as we follow well-marked dedicated bicycle routes on a pair of swanky E-bikes, included in our spa hotel stay at the Adler. Taking Promeneda trail from the village, we pass Baroque style churches, outdoor terraces, and ski chalets with blooming flower boxes full of rose and sweetpea. We continue through country lanes of Zona Artigianale and pass Cascata Waterfall into the quiet side of St. Cristina. Heading up into the hills of Monte Pana, we are treated to a hairpin turning route near World Cup Saslong.

"I feel like an Olympian," I tell Brian, as I gear the e-bike up the steepest part of the road.

"Well, we are in turbo mode right now," he says.

We turn off the main road and find gravel paths through spruce, larch, and fir forests as snowmelt cascades down ravines. A raven follows us for awhile as the trail narrows and we hear a woodpecker knocking on a fallen tree. It's lush and shadowed in this deep forest until we zip up and over into the meadows of Alpe di Suisi—Europe's largest high elevation alpine meadow. Sassolungo and Sciliar Massif rise like gray queens as chalets and rifugios dot the rolling pastures full of spring wildflowers.

We glide down to Saltria and over to Compatsch on a paved road as hikers roam the valleys and follow the headwaters of Rio Jender.



"It feels like we are in a dreamscape," I say, because around us are Sassopiatto, Sciliar, Euringer, Burgstall, Monte Pez, and Santner peaks, all of them gleaming with snow, as we zip and dip around curves on the e-bikes.

We picnic in Tirlir, which sits quiet and cozy in the elbow of jagged peaks. We park our bikes by a stand of fir, a streambed babbling near what can only be described as the best nature playground ever. Driftwood benches made into faces, a tree house with hidden decks, moss covered wooden mushroom seats, windows on trunks of trees with wood carvings of swans, swings made of heavy twine arching over the stream, "witches benches" and gnomes hiding in bushes made from wood, granite, twigs, and boards.

"A perfect picnic spot," Brian says, climbing up into a hidden treehouse.

After lunch, we explore the trails further, past farmland and field after field of pasture filled with yellow flowers. A marmot rises from a den and stares at us as we curve back into Val Gardena and Ortisei on more hairpin curves as Rio Gardena rushes into waterfalls.

"It's time for cake," I say, back at Adler as this spa resort knows what



fuels hungry e-bikers: five types of cakes, layers of cookies, and herbal teas. We nosh on the sunny veranda getting a sugar buzz before donning our bathrobes for the multi-level pool, sauna, steam, vista rooms, and outdoor sleeping pods overlooking Seceda Ridgeline. Soon, it's time for the panoramic "sauna experience" of music, deep heat, and essential oils of eucalyptus, menthol, pine, and lavender. Relaxation is key before dinner.

Dinner is a Tyrolian highlight with a Northern Italian focus, served a la carte in four courses, with fresh mountain herb/spring greens, local Ladin cheeses, and a multiple course dessert bar including homemade gelatos, strudels, tiramisus, local berry pies, multilayer cakes. We have the same table each breakfast and evening and the same personable Dritan takes care of us "like family" and offers excellent suggestions for wine pairings, activities, and best views. After loading our plates with fresh salads, cheeses, leek soups, and homemade bread, Brian and I choose pan-seared trout, with braised greens, and stuffed knodel before returning for plates full of chocolate cake and gelato.

The next morning, the Adventure Center points us in the direction of Seceda along backroads of Strada Cuca and the e-bikes zip straight up a zig-zag mountain pass. We crane our necks at the line of craggy peaks on one side, and cows munching hay next to fresco-adorned churches and ski chalet pocket gardens on the other. After a turbo boost, we are in alpine forests and a "beauty path" of a cycling trail toward Seceda. The Puez Odle Nature Park is a staggering ridgeline, surrounded by clouds seemingly suspended mid-air and rising like apparitions. We stop at Refugio Fermeda Hutte for pils and "pizza in the Puez" and take in the 360-degree view of Torri di Fermeda, Odle Group of peaks, Resciesa High Alps, Col Raiser, Sassolungo and Sella. After a long



lunch and nap in the sun, we take our time zooming down to St. Cristina for the rolling bike lanes back to our "cake and sauna" afternoon.

That night at dinner, Dritan suggests Alta Adige local wines to accompany the prosciutto capocollo board, mushrooms soups, filets of beef and local spring greens. There are also Ladin specialties of casunziei—a wedged ravioli, some aromatic graukase cheese, knodel for extra measure. We tell him of our adventures on two wheels and he suggests a route for the next morning.

"And you'll be having two cappuccinos again tomorrow?" he asks me. He knows my breakfast palate of fresh croissants, fresh fruits, homemade yogurts, granolas, and scrambled eggs.

"I think I'll just stay here forever," I say.

"We can offer you that," Dritan replies, winking.

Each night, we bundle up in feather quilts and sit on the private deck off our room, nightcaps in hand. "Let your soul fly" is the philosophy of Adler Resorts and with the village lights twinkling below us, a moon rising against the mountains surrounding us, it's a calm down from daily life and an escape to peacefulness.

if you go

Adler Spa Resort Dolomiti.
www.adler-resorts.com

A spa resort in Ortisei that treats you like family as you soak in the views and find relaxation in the Dolomites. Full/half board rates with a "not to miss" cake buffet in the afternoon before the spa beckons. The Adventure Center offers tours, bicycles, hiking routes, and untrampled byways for stunning vistas.