



De-stressing in the Dolomites

*A change may be as good as a holiday, but it can't beat a spa break.
Giselle Whiteaker seeks wellbeing at Adler Dolomiti in Italy.*



Clockwise from top left: The Dolomite Mountains; farms in the Dolomites; the indoor pool at Adler Dolomiti; a relaxation room with a view.



It seems like a misnomer flying into Innsbruck, Austria for a spa escape in Italy, but Ortisei, in the South Tyrol region, an autonomous province in northern Italy, lies closer to the Austrian border than to the gateway cities of Milan or Venice. Within less than two hours of landing, my friends and I descend on the Hotel Adler Dolomiti Spa & Sport Resort, ready to relax for a few days.

This part of Italy may have had a turbulent history, but it has left the small town in the Val Gardena valley with an eclectic mix of architecture that shows both Austrian and Italian influences. The same can be said of the people and the language. The Adler Dolomiti is no exception.

The history of the hotel began in 1810, when Josef Anton Sanoner acquired a small tavern in Ortisei. The property has remained in the family ever since, currently managed by the seventh generation of the Sanoner family. Perhaps due to this 200-year history, despite its extensive size – it has expanded and engulfed two further buildings – the hotel retains an intimate feel. The interior blends seamlessly with the exterior, with large picture windows and glass panelling opening onto private parkland, affording incredible views. The Dolomites, a mountain chain that is part of the Alps, stretch out before the hotel, the snow-capped peaks providing a stark contrast to the bright blue sky.

The rooms have a warm and natural feel, in part due to the use of larch, the blonde wood hinting at a Nordic ambience. The same wood is wrapped around the restaurant. It feels like walking into a sauna, albeit without the heat and with a gastronomic adventure awaiting. The food at Adler Dolomiti is an intriguing blend of the same Austrian and Italian influences, along with South Tyrolean specialties, dished with a dash of international fusion and a dollop of creativity.

The real reason we are here though, is the spa, said to be one of the best in the alps. The AGUANA water and wellness world comprises 3,500 square metres of pure wellness pleasure, so there's plenty to keep us occupied. Should we tire of self-indulgence, there are guided bike tours and hikes available, as well as a range of sporting activities and wellbeing classes, including yoga and Pilates. Even golfers have plenty of reason to visit – there are seven top golf courses nearby.

It's not only spa and sport breaks on offer here. The hotel is separated into two sections, with Adler Balance offering holistic wellness packages that can be focused to address issues that range from detox to weight loss and stress management. Housed in a separate section of the building, connected to the AGUANA, the Adler Balance Spa & Health Residenz is a private health refuge managed by an interdisciplinary team of physicians that combines modern western medicine with complementary and alternative healing methods to lay the foundation for long-term health and wellbeing. I've only just arrived and I'm already thinking about coming back for a detox.

Eagerly donning our swimsuits and robes, we make our way to the watery wonderland to while away the latter part of the day. The indoor pool opens into a spacious Jacuzzi within the "Crystal Pyramid" and sliding in-water doors lead to the outdoor pool with whirlpool features, allowing guests to swim between the two. Next to the outdoor pool is a warmer brine pool, mist drifting from its surface into the wintry air. One level higher is a more intimate hot whirlpool and a sauna with panoramic mountain views, as well as a relaxation room with comfortable chairs and tempered waterbeds. Before we know it, the day has disappeared, and we haven't even made it to the indoor sauna and steam room area. >>



Clockwise from top left: The lobby of Adler Dolomiti; the spa grotto; the restaurant; the panoramic sauna.

“Magical,” I find myself uttering, when we wander into the Adler Sauna World the next day. We follow a circular path into the cave-like structure, which wends past a multitude of sauna and steam room options, ranging from the rose bath in the women’s area to a blossom steam bath. I’m not sure how I feel about getting naked with strangers as is the norm in this area, but the dim lighting reassures me and I soon relax into the moment, inhaling the sweetly scented steam. It’s only my spa appointment that lures me back into my robe.

From the spa reception, I’m guided into a private treatment room, where I’m doused with curative volcanic mud, rich in minerals, and wrapped in plastic to cure. The layer beneath my body fills with warm water and envelops me, like a giant hug. Cocooned in this cosy bubble, I drift into spa bliss for 20 minutes. Rinsing away the mud, my skin feels silky smooth and the de-stress massage that follows is sheer pleasure, the therapist’s circling hands soothing away all of my cares.

Sitting in the lounge in the evening, sipping on a “Hugo” cocktail, composed of sparkling rosé, elderflower, mint and lemon juice, I notice that my friends are glowing with good health. I wonder if I look the same. If not, the salt grotto we have booked tomorrow morning should do the trick, with its underground salt lake and salt-stone sauna. I’ve also signed up for a honey back treatment to release the tension I perpetually carry in my shoulders.

“I feel great and we’ve only been here two days,” Jessica says with a yawn and we echo the sentiment. Adler Dolomiti is a treat for the senses and we’re already feeling the effects. “Let’s come back next year,” I suggest impulsively. The answer is a series of enthusiastic nods, the deal sealed with a round of delectable whisky sours. Pure relaxation has never tasted better. It must be the fresh mountain air. ■

For more information about Adler Dolomiti or Adler Balance, see www.adler-dolomiti.com

Here are some Italian properties to relax in:



Rovereto, Trento, Italy

Built in 1620 and renovated in 2012, Casa dei Turchi, in the city of Trent, located in the Adige River valley, highlights the privilege of living in a fascinating ancient manor with modern sustainable systems in the centre of a charming conurbation that is well connected to the rest of Italy and Europe. The possibilities with this property are endless. Currently configured as seven flats over five storeys, this could be a great commercial opportunity or it could be turned into a boutique hotel.

Guide price: 3,500,000€

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Lipari Island, Italy

This ancient stone house on Lipari Island, the largest of the Aeolian Islands in the Tyrrhenian Sea off the northern coast of Sicily, has a series of open terraces in front of the sea overlooking Unci Bay with its crystal clear water. The entire island is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. The home has recently been renovated, respecting preservation restrictions by Italian Art and Architectural Heritage.

Guide price: 2,200,000€

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Chia, Sardinia

This development sits in a spectacular and strategic position on top of a hill overlooking Chia Bay in a coastal area in southern Sardinia. There is a nearby golf course, *piazzetta* [square] and shopping area, and access to the pink flamingos in South Sardinia. These two elegant, contemporary villas have verandas, a pool, and a terrace and they are only 50 kilometres from Cagliari airport.

Guide price: 1,500,000 – 2,100,000€

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