

Dolomite delight

A new flight is opening up Italy's Alta Badia region to 'coolcationers', writes Josh Barrie

As an occasional skier, I was a little sceptical about what the Dolomite ski resort of Alta Badia might offer in the summer. What is the place, if you're not swooping down beautifully white pistes? No camaraderie on icy ski lifts? No après?

But the growing trend for 'coolcations' had me curious about visiting an Italian snowsports hotspot in the height of summer, so I hopped on board Italian airline SkyAlps' new flight from Gatwick to Bolzano, which lies about halfway between the northern shore of Lake Garda and Alta Badia. From the window of my low-flying turboprop plane, I could see mountains usually blanketed in snow instead lush with green meadows. Bolzano is the gateway to South Tyrol, where Italian, Austrian and Ladin – an ethnolinguistic group in the vein of Switzerland's Romansh speakers – cultures merge.

I spend my first night here and visit the South Tyrolean Museum of Archaeology, which happens to be home to Europe's oldest known ancestor.

Otzi, nicknamed the 'Iceman', is a naturally mummified body that was discovered on the Austria-Italy border in 1991 and believed to have lain there since between 3350BC and 3105BC. Culture-seeking clients could bookend the museum with the Maria Himmelfahrt Cathedral, a majestic 14th-century construction with a beautifully patterned roof and storytelling frescoes within.

SLOPESIDE SUMMER

From Bolzano, it's on to Alta Badia, sold in summer by operators including Inghams, Exodus Adventure Travels and Scott Dunn. The journey by car or bus is less than two hours, with regular services from Bolzano train station (from €29 one-way). The route weaves elegantly through the Italian Alps via a series of tunnels and tight bends.

In Corvara, one of the more upmarket Alta Badia locales, is the family-owned, Ladin-style Hotel Sassongher. The place might also be home to the most flamboyant bartender in the region: a theatrical man called Mr Saro who mixes one hell of a negroni. ➤