

Edited by LISA MINOT

High life

SECRET SOUTH TYROL IS MOUNTAIN PARADISE

DOLomite DELIGHT . . . Lake Pragser Wildsee

GRIN PEAKS . . . Bothy serves homemade food

Go: South Tyrol
 HOTEL Post in Olang is a member of the Vitalpina Hotel Group and offers double rooms from 88 euros pp per night, including breakfast buffet, afternoon buffet and a la carte dinner. Visit www.post-talderhof.com or www.vitalpina.info for details. Ryanair (www.ryanair.com) flies from Glasgow to Milan Bergamo from £27.51 inc taxes, fees and online check-in. To book a low-cost coach transfer from Milan Bergamo to South Tyrol visit www.suedtirol.info/lowfare. For more on South Tyrol visit www.suedtirol.info

HERE'S a place where you can really go up in the world.

Quite literally, because in South Tyrol you're in the midst of Italy's most breathtaking mountain scenery.

It's an area of such dramatic, rugged beauty – featuring the Alps and Dolomites – that it's a delight to explore.

But to most Brits, Italy's northern province is a well-kept secret, and that's a mystery because it's such an amazing location for an active break.

In winter, it's a magnet for skiers but in summer the majestic mountains and lush green valleys are transformed into a paradise for hikers and cyclists.

However, we did have to remind ourselves that we were actually in Italy, as the only

language we heard during our stay in the peaceful village of Olang was German.

That's because the area – called Alto Adige in Italian – was part of Austria for more than five centuries until 1919, and it retains much of its influence.

Our base was the wonderful Hotel Post in Olang (Valdaora in Italian), in the broad Pustertal valley.

Take a few steps from the hotel and you can join one of the vast network of signposted walks. Amazingly, there are around 20,000km of well-marked trails in South Tyrol – for all levels of fitness.

Clanging

From Olang, which is over 3,200ft above sea level, we climbed the steep path through woodland to the bothy at Angerer Alm high above the village.

Our only other compan-

ions were a couple of cows, which we heard before we saw them because of their clanging bells.

It doesn't get much more Alpine than that.

Our reward was to head back to the hotel for a well-earned coffee and huge slab of strudel or cake from the afternoon buffet.

The hotel organises walks three days a week and we joined guide Wolfe on one.

Our party was driven 30 minutes from the village, where we began our ascent of Gonner Alm on well-trodden paths.

Clouds drifted below us as we hiked to a height of 6,479ft.

On the way back down, we enjoyed a real treat at one of the many mountain refuges, tucking into a lunch of local speciality Graükase (grey cheese) which had been made



on the premises.

And we were sent on our way with a warming grappa, made from berries on the mountain.

On another day, we lapped up the amazing scenery of the Lake Pragser Wildsee – and you can appreciate why it's been a holiday destination for top Italian politicians as the stunning white Dolomites rise spectacularly from the water's edge.

But if you'd rather use two wheels than two feet then there are plenty of off-road tracks to keep you pedalling for days.

The Rent and Go shop in Mitterolang, the centre of Olang, will hire you bikes and

drive you to the start of your route.

We were given our map to guide us back to the village 16 miles away – with our three-hour off-road ride an exhilarating way to see the countryside.

And the friendly staff will even rescue you if you get lost or suffer a puncture.

You can also hop onto another kind of saddle and enjoy some horse-riding.

The Prugger family, who own the Hotel Post, also run the bustling stables and experienced

riders can enjoy the countryside on the region's famous brown and white Haflingers.

Novices can also use the wonderful facilities, and by the end of our second visit we were trotting with confidence thanks to our tutor and patient horses, who I think took pity on us!

The pristine, four-star Hotel Post is a haven for weary guests – with walkers and cyclists returning from a day on the mountains greeted with a welcome afternoon snack.

That's after you've enjoyed a bumper breakfast to set you up for the day, and it's all rounded off with a wonderful four or five-course dinner.

The hotel also has an excellent Wellness area, *left*, and the indoor pool offers panoramic vistas.

The rooms are spacious and clean too – and there's even a rucksack for you to use.

The view from our balcony stretched out across the valley and opposite was the 7,431ft Kronplatz, whose summit can

be reached by cable car from the town of Bruneck.

This is the administrative centre of the valley, and the pedes-

trianised Old Town bustles with colourful shops and cafes.

A 20-minute bus ride from Olang, you'll hear more Italian here as you meander along with a castle perched high above.

Only two per cent of visitors come from the UK and one barman told us we were only the third English speakers he'd served in six months.

Most locals speak English, though they might be rusty.

But they'd love to welcome more Scots – and I couldn't recommend South Tyrol more highly.

KEVIN ESSON

