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The best day skiing ever? A wine-tasting tour of the Italian slopes



Fine wine and skiing... the perfect match CREDIT: FREDDY PLANINSCHKEK

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“Are you ready for skiing and drinking?” Our personal sommelier, Hubert Kastlunger, poses the magic rhetorical question with a wide smile, clicking neatly into his bindings as the afternoon sun sparkles across the coral-coloured peaks of Europe’s most striking mountain range, the Dolomites.

Yes, 1.30pm is wine o'clock here in the Alta Badia ski area, part of Italy's (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/ski/articles/Best-Italian-ski-resorts/>) northernmost province of Südtirol, one of Italy’s most highly regarded yet lesser-known (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/ski/galleries/The-best-ski-resorts-youve-probably-never-heard-of/>) wine regions. Especially aboard the Sommelier on the Slopes tour, open to intermediate (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/ski/articles/The-best-ski-resorts-for-intermediates/>) and above skiers and snowboarders, on a selection of dates over the winter.

Our group of six meets on the mountain above our base in the village of Corvara (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/ski/resort-guides/Ski-Corvara-resort-guide/>). From here Hubert will lead us to three of Alta Badia’s loveliest mountain huts – happily, he is a ski instructor as well as sommelier at the Hotel Schönblick in Bolzano, the capital of Südtirol. First we’ll sip sparkling wine, then whites, and lastly reds, all local to the region. As much as our host's opening statement may lead some to imagine a group of sozzled skiers stumbling down the slopes after a few too many at lunch, this is a tasting tour designed to sample the finest menus and enjoy similarly fine skiing, so booze-hungry après animals may wish to look elsewhere.

After a few runs in the direction of another Alta Badia village, San Cassiano, we skid eagerly up to the door of the Tablà hut. Part James Bond (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/ski/galleries/James-Bond-on-skis-007s-greatest-moments-on-the-slopes/>), part Chippendale dancer, Hubert whips off his ski jacket (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/ski/gear/The-best-ski-jackets-gear-guide/>) to reveal a natty bow tie, white shirt and black apron. Lifting a bubbly flute into the chill clean air, he anoints our mission, “Sparkling is the right wine to start with.”

A short history of this faultless bevvvy, including assessing its colour and scent, reveals a blend of chardonnay, pinot blanc and pinot noir. “It’s the same as a woman, this pinot noir grape,” Hubert observes. “It’s very nice but it’s very difficult.”

Alta Badia is in the iconic Italian Dolomite mountains

After enjoying three different versions of the Südtirolean bubbles, we're back on the piste. Built by Italians for Italians, Alta Badia's 130km of beautifully groomed, cruisy runs feed into the Sella Ronda circuit of slopes, and are peppered with dozens of elegant huts. Gastronomy is king here, and [mountain lunches](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/ski/galleries/The-best-mountain-restaurants/) rate among the finest anywhere.

Sommelier on the Slopes, launched in 2015, has been a sell-out success and complements the area's many foodie events. These include A Taste for Skiing, an annual partnership with local chefs that has been running since 2009, leading to affordable Michelin-starred dishes being offered in more than a dozen huts across the slopes.

After a few runs up and over to our second stop, Ütia de Bioch, also above San Cassiano, Hubert introduces us to three lovely whites - a nonchalant pinot blanc typical of the Südtirol, a Weissburgunder (German for pinot blanc) with an apple and pear fruity nose, and a Gewürztraminer that is heady with aromatic peaches. Viticulture in Südtirol adheres to a low production, high quality ethos - 700 to 800 wine producers account for just one per cent of Italy's wine production.

The world's best mountain restaurants

Hubert. “In a bottle of wine there is about 80 per cent water, and the doctors say you should drink a lot of water.”

For our last stop, we head back over towards Corvara and Rifugio Col Alt. Hubert fixes his bow tie in the door reflection as we head in to tackle the reds – a pinot noir and, uniquely, a lagrein, a velvety rich cassis and blackberry concoction of a grape grown only in the Südtirol. “This is a small production wine from Bolzano. I know some producers who are running out of lagrein by February. Not a drop left,” says Hubert.

We do our bit to further deplete the delectable supplies of winemaker Franz Haas, whose vines benefit from warm winds off Lake Garda. “Barolo, Chianti... you can drink that around the world but this is special. Only in Südtirol,” Hubert explains, before we all take another life-affirming swig.

Host Hubert dresses the part on the slopes CREDIT: FREDDY PLANINSCHKEK

“Skiing and drinking, that’s my job,” he laughs. “My perfect day is to ski from 8.30am until 11.30am then have a very good lunch. What could be more perfect? And today is only Monday!” And after sharing a taste of his paradise with us, our skiing sommelier bids us ciao, zips his jacket up over his bow tie and disappears elegantly down the mountain, apron flapping in the breeze.

Need to know

Sommelier on the Slopes tours in Alta Badia, including four tutored tastings, cost €30 per person and take place on 18 December 2018, 15 and 29 January 2019; 5 and 19 February 2019; 12 and 26 March 2019 from 1.30pm to 4pm. Advance booking essential, via the tourist offices in each village. Find out more at [altabadia.org](https://www.altabadia.org/en/) (<https://www.altabadia.org/en/>), including about events such as A Taste for Skiing, Wine Safari and Sunrise Breakfast.

[Ski Solutions](https://www.skisolutions.com/) (<https://www.skisolutions.com/>) offers packages to Alta Badia, with a seven-night half-board stay at Sporthotel Panorama in Corvara starting at £995 per person, based on two sharing and including flights to Innsbruck and transfers.

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