ALTA BADIA AND HOW I MAKE IT

By Carole Edrich

Travel columnist Carole Edrich takes us on a tour of Alta Badia.





Combine the gorgeous glacial peaks and verdant green valleys of North Western Italy, an Austrian sense of order, and a place where Italian, German, and the local Ladin language are used interchangeably, then add Ladin traditions, gastronomy, comfort, and culture and you'll have a good idea of what Alta Badia and Val Gardena in Corvara are like.

I fell in love with the area on a press trip years ago. Back then, I had been led to expect that my pre-cancer strength would return, so I didn't mind struggling with my cycling and getting stuck up the climbing wall I had scaled to take better photos. Since then I've wanted to return to walk the beautiful mountains, join the annual cycling marathon, and stay at the gorgeous Hotel La Perla. This column gave me the opportunity to do the first two with 2 full days (3 nights) at Hotel Marmolada. It's a lovely place with traditional Alpine décor, exquisite cuisine, the famous Ladin hospitality, and exceedingly friendly staff. However, with my ME, undiagnosed extra disabilities, and current lack of fitness the marathon felt like too big a risk.



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Press trips aren't holidays. They're hard-won, hard work, cramming everything from a normal ten-day break into two or three. There's no time to be ill, have time off or a lay-in. I worry that asking would leave me with no trip. I ask about gyms (weights help me manage my conditions), but am almost always ignored. Episodes while travelling do occasionally happen. But provided I stay hydrated and get early nights, I can usually manage. I then crash hard – worse without weight training - when I'm home.

I love writing, pitching stories, meeting people, and travelling. I can manage my energy and get more work done as a freelancer because I can choose my hours and approach. I couldn't physically manage a conventional employment contract at the level of intellectual engagement and seniority that would fulfil me. But freelance travel writing isn't even easy for the able-bodied. Rates of pay haven't changed since the '80s. Appreciation of what we do is muddied by Artificial Intelligence, influencers, bloggers, podcasters, and people who write for free. Travel's becoming more inclusive and people are more understanding. Yet despite everyone's best intentions, nothing has changed for me.





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I still want to go back. Back for local walks on wide accessible pathways, for crystal air and fresh bright sun, for friendly locals and interesting tourists, for hiking and cycling (some of which is accessible), and the skiing (which includes an adaptive form of the sport). For the blend of tradition and modernity, the centuries-old farmhouses, traditional crafts, churches, contemporary architecture, fusion food, shopping and supermarkets selling cannabis chocolate, and the Italian, German and Ladin language mash-up. For the innovative wine cellars of La Perla (and hopefully a stay there), the opportunity to classic-car-spot, and one day – hopefully - the Maratona de Dolomites itself.

And Another Thing...

As a proud Board member of Unlimited (still the largest funder of disabled arts in the world), I'm pleased to share that a whopping £650,000 in funding was recently awarded to 17 disabled artists. We back disabled artists and have done so since we got started in 2013. (That's the Royal 'we' - I only became part of it a few years ago). Unlimited officially declares 'When disabled artists are represented at a proportional level across the cultural sector, we will cease to exist." This funding round took our total funding levels awarded to £7.1 million to 538 artists.

More information (including job opportunities) can be found at **weareunlimited.org.uk/**

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