

# Piste de Résistance

Travel writer Kate Lough has her tastebuds tickled as she weaves her way through the Dolomites on a new ski safari, curated by Italy expert Merrion Charles

We are gathered around a rustic wooden table, surrounded by shelves stacked with wine as we watch Stefano wind the Ferrari of meat slicers into action, producing perfect pieces of speck. Glasses of Cuvée Marianne are poured, and we toast to our Dolomiti ski safari. Stefano is the owner and host of White Deer San Lorenzo Mountain Lodge, our first stop and one of the area's only private chalets. He's also a man with an infectious passion for the surrounding mountains, the land and all its small-but-mighty producers, whose love for their work can be tasted in every bite and sip.

It doesn't take long to appreciate that the Dolomites offer its guests a new kind of luxury. Not fast cars and jeroboams, but a quietly authentic experience that's increasingly hard to come by, and by no means limited to skiing. The lodge is beautiful but simple, traditional but stylish. Dinner is hearty and local – fonduta ravioli and venison with polenta – each course paired with wines (including the local lagrein grape) and finished off with Stefano's homemade limoncello. We sleep easily, hearts and bellies full.

Our first day of skiing – powered by an early breakfast of homemade yoghurts and jams, pastries and freshly squeezed juice – covers the nearby Plan de Corones. We are being guided on our safari by local legend Mario Delmonego, who was born and bred in nearby Arabba. Humble and gentle, he is an encyclopedia of local *schussing* knowledge and knows every last lift operator and restaurateur in the area. This comes in very handy in the vast Dolomiti Superski area, which is stretched out over 16 separate ski regions and encompassing around 1,200km of slopes.

Our first day complete, we retreat to the lodge to make the most of its outdoor thermal pool overlooking the valley and its very welcome steam room, sauna and massage chair before another stellar dinner with brilliant company. The next morning, the blow of leaving the lodge is softened by the sound of a helicopter landing, ready to whisk us to Cinque Torri for our second ski day. The skies are a brilliant blue and the scenery is mesmerising. The young pilot Gabriele drops us on the mountain top ahead of the first lifts opening, allowing us the bliss of having the slopes to ourselves.

After a generous bowl of gnocchi at mountainside hotel and restaurant Rifugio Averau, we are scooped up again by the chopper, swooping in and around mountain peaks before landing by Sofie Hut in Santa Cristina, where we sample the owner's new amaro digestif and tiramisu. We spend a delightful afternoon traversing the slopes until the early evening, as we make our way down to Locanda degli Artisti. A boutique hotel run by the Rossi family, it's nestled in the picturesque town of Canazei and the food is as much of a focus as the art. We feast that evening on endless courses of beautifully presented, locally sourced dishes, such as fried veal head, red prawns and pearl barley risotto.

The family also own and run our final stop, the secluded Rifugio Fuciade, which we reach after a day's skiing in Arabba, with its wide pistes and some very appealing black runs for more advanced skiers. Typical of the region, these rifugios cook up sensational food in the middle of the mountain and have simple bedrooms – with postcard-perfect views – to roll into after dinner. Much like the night before, we are spoilt with another gastronomic experience that involves *ciajoncie*, a ravioli-style pasta filled with wild pears, figs and cinnamon that we walk off on a hike the next day.

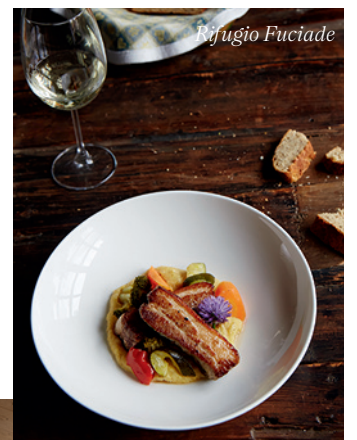
This is a ski safari that nourishes the soul and the stomach, with the most beautiful mountain scenery thrown in for good measure.



White Deer Lodge, San Lorenzo



Locanda degli Artisti Hotel, Canazei



Rifugio Fuciade



Rifugio Fuciade

The Dolomites Ski Safari is priced from £3,300 per person based on six in the group, and includes accommodation, dinner, guiding with Mario Delmonego, ski hire and ski pass, [merrioncharles.com](http://merrioncharles.com)



George Club Chair Fawn Goat Hair 61x72x71cmH £3,295 **Barrington**  
Hurricane Lamp £175 **Westray** Sheepskin Throw 180x150cm £850