

ITALY



THE ONLY WAY IS UP

Italy's World Heritage-listed Dolomites are a haven for foodies and hikers alike. By **Ute Junker**

If I didn't know better, I would say we have taken a wrong turn. The deeper we head into Alto Adige, Italy's northern-most province, the more I feel we have accidentally crossed a border and strayed into neighbouring Austria. Instead of the rolling hills and fertile plains that characterise much of Italy, studded with baroque cities and charming hill

towns, we find ourselves in a very different landscape. Here, verdant green slopes rise to cloud-scraping peaks, punctuated by swathes of pine forests and picturesque alpine villages.

There is a reason for this distinctly Teutonic vibe. This province, also known by its German name of Sudtiro, was part of Austria until the

end of World War I, and German is still widely-spoken. It has long been popular with European skiers; locals will proudly tell you that there are more than 1200 kilometres of ski slopes. However, the area's stunning peaks and high plains – which have scored a UNESCO World Heritage listing for their exceptional beauty as well as their geomorphology – are

increasingly drawing summer visitors who have realised that the Dolomites offer some of the most scenic hikes in Europe. Which is why, when we wake up on our first morning in the mountains, the first thing we do is to reach for our walking shoes.

The area is so rich in trails that choosing which one to tackle first is difficult. So we outsource our