

Alison/Norma/Shelagh– The Dolomites, Italy – June 2024

After a successful holiday in Austria last year, we decided to book another Ramblers Adagio trip, this time to the Dolomites in northern Italy, and we weren't disappointed. Our flight from Heathrow to Venice was uneventful. There, our leader John Phelps met us, before a 3 hour coach trip north through scenic and winding roads. We were a total of 14, quite a manageable size for a walking group.

We were based at the Hotel Ladinia, in the small town of La Villa in an area known as Alta Badia. Our rooms were well appointed, with the only downside being the noisy main road we overlooked. The staff themselves were friendly and helpful and we soon settled in. We were booked on a half-board basis with a good choice of dishes, although translating the menu could be tricky, and on one evening we were offered local Ladin specialities. The food was beautifully presented, if prepared differently, and the challenge was not to eat too much!

This was a Ramblers Grade 3 holiday but taken at a leisurely pace, hence Adagio, giving us plenty of opportunities for photo stops. Scheduled walks were between 3 to 5 miles, but with options to extend, so we were averaging 7 miles per day, with ample time for lunch and coffee breaks. The alpine paths were often broken or uneven, with ascents/descents of up to 270 metres so good boots and poles were essential, as well as being regular walkers. Layers of clothing were also needed due to the drop in temperature at higher altitudes.

Our walking itinerary over six days had to be adapted somewhat to take account of weather conditions. We had hoped to visit the Marmolada glacier but due to heavy snowfall the cable car was not running, and we had to content ourselves with viewing it from a distance. However, our walks in the alpine meadows, covered with carpets of wildflowers, more than made up for this. To reach the higher altitudes we travelled in gondolas, chairlifts and cable car. We had to learn the technique for climbing quickly on and off chairlifts but were expert by the end of the week. The experience of soaring high above the ground was amazing and afforded us some stunning views of the surrounding mountains. A visit via cablecar to Piccolo Lagazuoi, at 2,778 metres, was a highlight.

The Dolomites are located in a region known as 'Sud Tirol', which was before the First World War part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. We saw evidence of the bitter battles between the Italian and Austro-Hungarian forces in the caves and tunnels carved high in these mountains at Lagazuoi, Cinque Torre and the Tre Sassi Fort (now a museum) at Passo Valparola. After the fall of the Austro-Hungarian empire, the Sud Tirol became part of Italy. Despite this, it continues to have a distinctly Tyrollean/Austrian feel in the houses with steeply sloping roofs and colourful window boxes. Town names are shown in three languages: German, Italian and Ladin, the local dialect. The cuisine is also influenced with, for example, Linzer torte, Sacher torte and Apfel Strudel (delicious!), dumplings in broth, and veal with sauerkraut, etc.

One of our memorable pleasures was to have coffee in a mountain cafe, with sunshine, good company and surrounded by panoramic views, a real holiday treat!

PS A final tip for future travel is to check in on-line in advance, as British Airways had overbooked our return flight and two of our group were obliged to wait an additional four hours for a later flight.

Alison Hales, Norma Fazey & Shelagh Wells