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The Dolomites
mountain range and
the city of Corvara



VEL

Dolomites: Peaks of Gastronomy

The UNESCO World Heritage site, known as the rooftop of Italy, offers stunning landscapes and memorable cuisine

by CECILY MABASA



Granite structures typical of the Dolomites Region

MOST PEOPLE JOURNEY TO ITALY FOR THE SHOPPING AND HISTORICAL SIGHTS but the Dolomites is the Italy for the adventurous.

The escapade began as soon as the plane landed in Milan. A bus ride, three trains and a minivan ride, brought the party to Corvara, the heart of Alta Badia and the base for exploring the Dolomites. Far from the glitz of Milan and the frenzied town squares of Rome, it is not quite Lonely Planet material. There were quaint villages with traditional architecture, known as Tyrolean, on the way up the mountains. There are flowers by the windows during the summer but it is during the fall season when this region blooms in color. The mountainous topography makes for its most thrilling scenery. The leaves were in autumn hues and life slipped into the pleasantly sleepy rhythms of the season.

Home for the next few days was Hotel La Peria, a charming lodge that houses one of the three Michelin-starred restaurants in the valley—La Stüa de Michil. Gourmands make the journey to the Dolomites for the gastronomic trifecta, which also includes La Siriola in Hotel Ciasa Salares and St. Hubertus in Relais & Chateaux Hotel Rosa Alpina. The first gastronomic hiking experience with the guide Augustina came after a night's rest and Ladin cuisine at the Stua. Besides breathtaking scenery and wilderness, the stop points and rewards in the Dolomites are hearty meals. Hiking here is a gentle, even social activity. The hills are populated with day hikers, from toddlers on their parents' backs to grey-haired pensioners. The walking was easy on undulating meadows of springy grass, warm sunshine, vistas of mountain ranges that seem to



La Stüa de Michil restaurant in Hotel La Peria

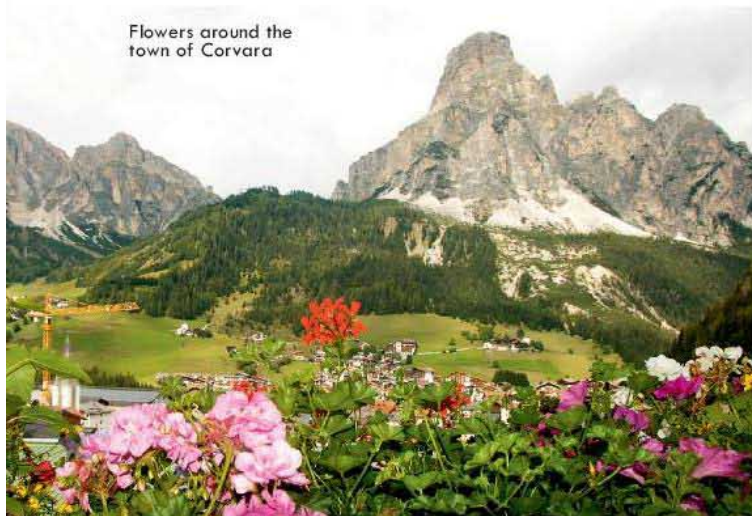
stretch to the Alps off in the foggy distance.

Augustina takes the group exploring over the next few days to different corners of the region. The next meal was reached amidst scenic rock formations one funicular ride up Mount Lagazuoi, a 2800-meter mountain with peaks frequented by black crows. Warm potato soup and homemade pasta were served at the Rifugio Lagazuoi, a mountain inn situated on one of the

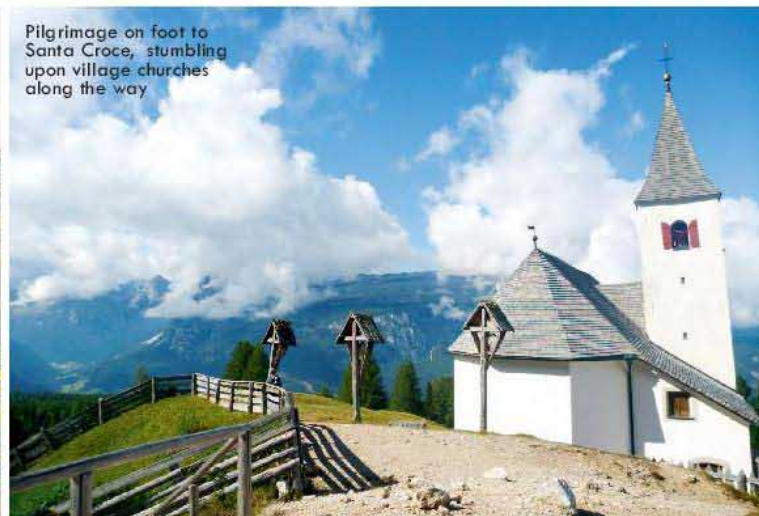
highest points. It boasts of a spectacular view of the Dolomites mountains.

On the way back, there were cliff-hugging hairpin bends and occasional stops due to bovine roadblocks, including biscuit-colored cows with big brass bells around their necks. The gentle beasts stared nonchalantly at hiking groups and left the haunting sound of bells as they sauntered away. A hike to the top of Piz Boe, the highest peak in the Sella Massif

Flowers around the town of Corvara



Pilgrimage on foot to Santa Croce, stumbling upon village churches along the way



mountain range, and a visit down to Corvara in Badia, a ski village known as a ski competition venue, was on the itinerary over the next few days.

One of the greatest thrills for an experienced hiker is walking a *via ferrata* or road of iron, a route up a

mountain fixed with ladders, cables and the like. It affords a different way to enjoy the sheer magnificence of the peaks. It is said that at least one attempt to cross this has to be done. Near Rifugio Averau, *via ferrata* expert Marica gave a brief lesson on climbing techniques, equipment and, most importantly, safety. The experience was nothing short of unforgettable. Travelers secured only by a harness and waiting instructions from the guide find their heart thumping as they progressed up the wall of the mountain at a snail's pace.

The hike the next day to Pralongià plateau, just above Corvara and San Cassiano, was short and easy. Travelers looking for tranquility have a 360 degree view of the Dolomites and memorable food. *Tris di Canederli*, a

soup with small balls of bread and meat, was paired with home-made bratwurst, *Tris di pasta* (trio of pastas) and apple strudels.

The experience of climbing the Dolomites at sunrise was matched by a full South Tyrolean breakfast of Ladin speck, freshly-cooked omelette, strawberries, peach, fresh yoghurt, oven-warm bread, traditional Ladin cakes or *fortaes* (fried with sugar and marmalade) and *sones* (fried with apple) with warm hot cocoa at the Jimmy Hut.

At the neighboring village of San Cassiano, third-generation owner Hugo led the way to a loft suite. Keys to a Mini Cooper were lent for a spin around the area. Over cocktails and *amuse bouches* especially prepared by the chef in their St. Hubertus kitchen, Hugo

provided glimpses into the San Cassiano life. Pride of place was apparent in their village and a concern to preserve the culture of the Alta Badia. He charmed listeners with the history of San Cassiano, his family and the trails of the Dolomites. He also told stories of the celebrities they hosted—from George Clooney to Tom Cruise and his wife Katie Holmes, and even royalty. The hotel was not just a business but the family's life and legacy.

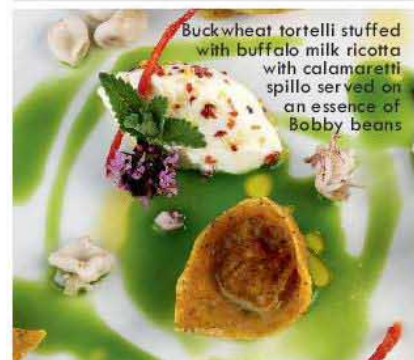
Hugo later ushered guests to the dining room of the two-Michelin star restaurant St. Hubertus. The restaurant itself is cozy and elegant, reminiscent of upscale ski cabins with mounted antlers and old world silver candelabras. The Dolomites experience commenced with Niederkofler's hearty yet delicate dishes, from lobster with peach and verbena jelly to *foie gras*. Sorbet was served in cones and homemade ice cream was as thick as clotted cream with hints of vanilla and spices. It was food that conveyed the best and authentic side of Italy. □



Sea urchin risotto on monkfish carpaccio and bottarga froth

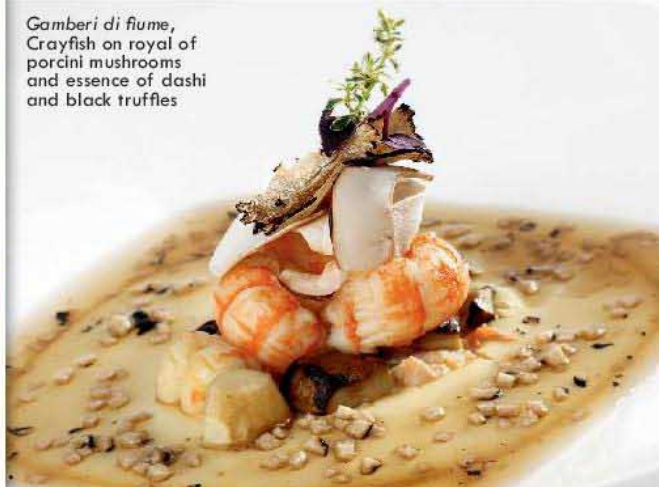


Fillet of veal in a porcini mushroom crust on braised Tropea onions served with a tranche of foie gras on a fond of tripe and port wine jelly



Buckwheat tortelli stuffed with buffalo milk ricotta with calamaretti spillo served on an essence of Bobby beans

Gamberi di fiume, Crayfish on royal of porcini mushrooms and essence of dashi and black truffles



The writer traveled with the luxury adventure group Sea to Summit Explorations. For more information, phone (917) 868 7971 or (2) 815 8233, visit <seatosummitadv.net>, email <ces@seatosummitadv.net>

CONTRIBUTORS



REUBEN RAMAS CAÑETE, PH.D

Reuben Ramas Cañete, Ph.D. is an artist, independent curator, and noted art critic. Currently Associate Professor at the University of the Philippines Diliman, Reuben has been writing professionally about art since garnering the prestigious Leo Benesa Award in 1996. As an artist, he has held three solo exhibitions. He had been contributing to *lifestyleasia* since 1999 under then-editor Nestor Mata. He is also currently for sister publication *BluPrint* contributes as art critic and architectural historian. His most recent book, *Art and Its Contexts: Essays, Reviews, and Interviews on Philippine Art* has just been published by the UST Publishing House. He writes about Victorio Edades in this issue (*May 2012*).

BIANCA GONZALEZ

Bianca Gonzalez majored in communications with a minor in philosophy in Ateneo de Manila University. Apart from being a TV host, Bianca is editor-at-large of *Meg* magazine. For the April 2012 issue, she wrote about DOTC secretary Mon Jimenez.



SANDRO PAREDES

Sandro Paredes is both a photographer and a writer. He has taken on various assignments including fashion, portraits, weddings, concerts, sports, editorials and many others. Husband to wife Sheng and father to Sachi and Jacob, he tries to sum up several frames or 140 characters on twitter between family duties. He shot Buddha Bar for the Dining section and the Alliance Francaise dinner for *Entertaining* (*April 2012*).



CECILY MABASA

This past decade, Cecily's quest for that unique experience and unexplored luxury destinations in remote places has brought her to Patagonia, Everest, Bhutan, the Arctic Circle, Inca Trails, Antarctica among many other places. The fun is not only in reaching her destination but in the planning, research and stumbling upon even more unique adventures. Through *Sea To Summit* explorations, she hopes to share these experiences with fellow adventurers. She chronicles her visit to the Dolomites in Italy in this issue (*May 2012*).

