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Photo: Freddy Planinschek, Alex Moling and Alta Badia

Beyond the spectacle... Alta Badia

Location straddles key Dolomite passes like Passo Gardena and Passo Campolongo, historically used for trade and now serving as scenic entry points to the ski and hiking area.



The ski area connects five villages through lifts and pistes without requiring road transport between them.

Alta Badia's ski panorama operates between approximately 1,324 and 2,778 metres above sea level, ensuring consistent winter conditions even in early December.

The World Cup race in Alta Badia is a global broadcast, but the real substance of the week unfolds well away from the television cameras. The slalom on Gran Risa lasts only minutes; the system that makes it possible runs continuously, quietly, with almost obsessive precision. What distinguishes Alta Badia is not the event itself, but the layered infrastructure, people and routines that operate before, during and after the spectacle.

The scale of preparation becomes evident early. Skiing here is not framed as adrenaline but as calibration. Slopes are read, not attacked. Snow conditions are discussed in technical terms, shaped overnight by teams who adjust grooming patterns according to

temperature shifts measured in fractions rather than degrees. Even recreational skiing reflects this mindset. The terrain encourages rhythm and balance, rewarding consistency over aggression, a style shaped by the same thinking that governs the racecourse.

Preparation for such a stage is scientific. Alta Badia operates one of the most advanced snowmaking systems in the Alps, coordinated through SnowMan, a digital platform integrating real-time data from snow guns, grooming machines and satellite-based snow-depth measurement. With temperatures just 2.5 degrees below zero, operators can stabilise the entire Gran Risa system, controlling density, humidity and consistency to meet FIS standards.



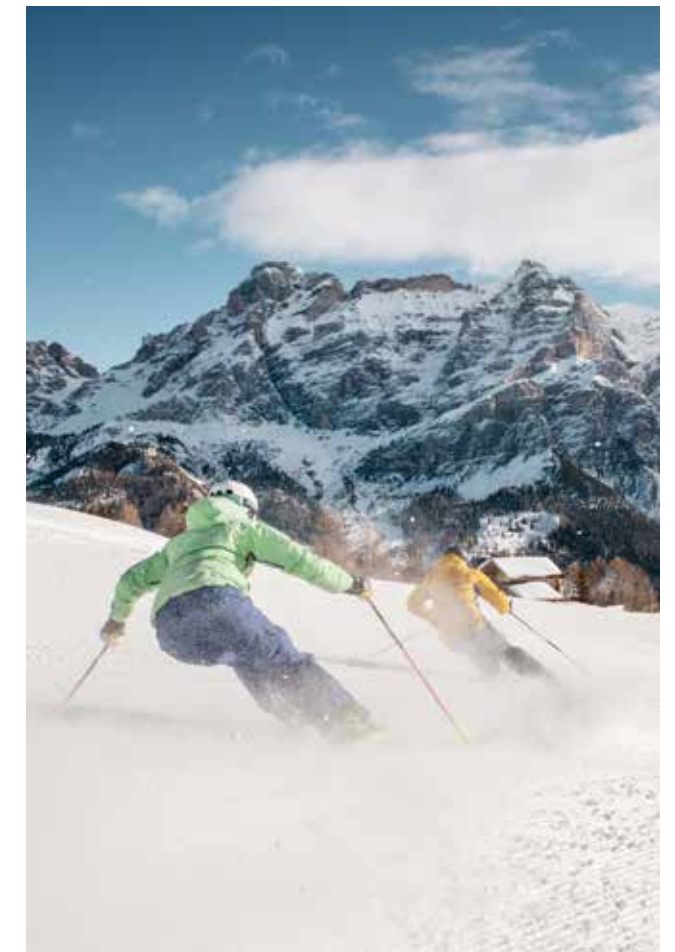
Ski domain spans 130 kilometres of meticulously groomed pistes between 1,324 and 2,778 m above sea level, linking six traditional villages and offering direct access to the iconic Sellaronda ski circuit.



Alta Badia has hosted 40 World Cup race editions, making it one of the most consistent stops on the men's circuit.

Gran Risa has a vertical drop of roughly 448 metres, compressed into a course length of just over 1.2 kilometres.

One of the more revealing moments takes place far from competition, skiing alongside Filippo Barbero, a former pilot of the Freccie Tricolori. His approach mirrors aviation logic: anticipate, align, correct early. Speed is secondary to control. It is a reminder that Alta Badia's culture of performance is rooted less in spectacle than in discipline. The mountains here favour those who listen.



Hospitality follows the same philosophy. Lunch at the gourmet mountain hut Ütia Bioch does not interrupt the day but sustains it. At altitude, menus are constructed around energy management and flavour clarity rather than excess. Hut culture in Alta Badia has evolved beyond rustic tradition into something closer to alpine gastronomy, without losing its functional roots. The result is food that supports long days outdoors while quietly reflecting the region's culinary ambition.

Evenings shift the perspective again. A gala dinner inside the medieval Ciastel Colz in La Villa places the contemporary event within a much older context. Stone walls absorb sound, conversation replaces ceremony, and the setting subtly reframes the idea of luxury. This is not about opulence but continuity, about hosting modern gatherings inside structures that predate tourism by centuries.

As race day approaches, the valley tightens its focus. Volunteers, many of whom have worked the event for decades, move into position alongside military units, technicians and organisers. Under the direction of Andy Varallo, the organising committee balances sport and culture through carefully designed hospitality areas overlooking the finish zone, from the LEITNER VIP Lounge to the more traditional Gran Risa Chalet.



Gourmet mountain huts in Alta Badia operate at altitudes above 2,000 metres while collaborating with Michelin-starred chefs.



More than 1,300 volunteers contribute annually to the World Cup in Alta Badia, many of them local residents involved for decades.



Beyond downhill runs, Alta Badia has developed a network of mountain huts where Alpine-Ladin tradition meets contemporary gastronomy. Alongside barley soups, speck and local cheeses, chefs apply fine-dining techniques, curated wine lists and seasonal sourcing, transforming lunch on the slopes into a considered culinary experience without losing its regional roots.

HOW ÜTIA BIOCH REDEFINED MOUNTAIN DINING

Perched above the Alta Badia slopes, Ütia Bioch is less a mountain hut than a high-altitude expression of intent. Owned by Markus Valentini, it operates at the intersection of alpine function and contemporary gastronomy, without ever losing sight of its setting. What distinguishes Bioch is not reinvention, but elevation: traditional Ladin hospitality refined through precision and ambition.

The hut houses more than 13,000 bottles of wine, making it one of the most serious cellars accessible on skis anywhere in the Alps. The collection is curated for altitude, with an emphasis on structure, acidity and ageing potential rather than fashion. Storage conditions are carefully controlled despite the mountain environment, a technical feat in itself.

In the kitchen, Bioch collaborates with Massimiliano Alajmo, whose three Michelin stars at Le Calandre place him among the most influential chefs in Europe. The partnership does not transplant fine dining wholesale to the mountain, but adapts it: flavours are concentrated, portions calibrated, and dishes designed to sustain skiers without dulling them.

Markus describes his approach as forward-looking but rooted. Ütia Bioch proves that avant-garde hospitality in the Alps does not require spectacle, only confidence, discipline, and a deep understanding of place.



Ladin is still spoken daily in Alta Badia, making it one of the few Alpine regions where an ancient Rhaeto-Romance language remains actively used.

Alta Badia's Sellaronda ski circuit connects four valleys in a continuous loop more than 40 km long.

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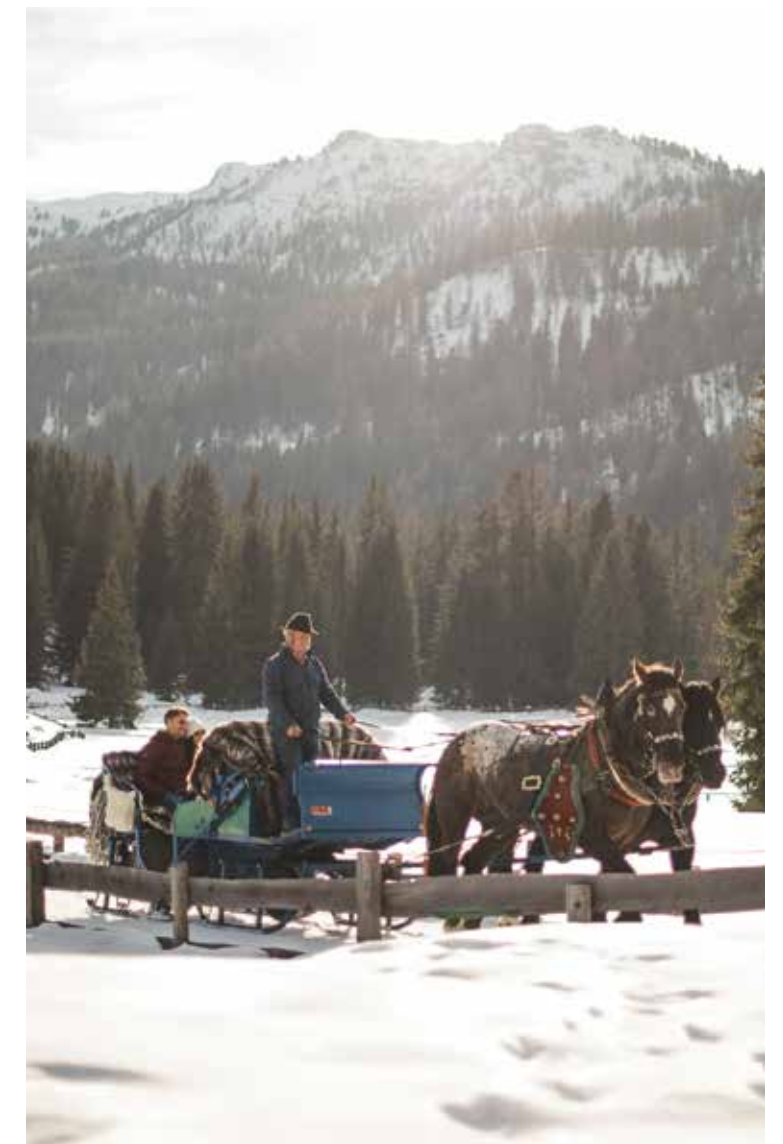
The Gran Risa slope follows a natural timber-transport channel, which explains its compressed rhythm and abrupt pitch changes.

More than 80% of Alta Badia's pistes are equipped with snowmaking systems, ensuring reliable coverage throughout winter and allowing consistent grooming even in variable conditions.



Each reflects a facet of Ladin identity without slipping into folklore. Race day brings the most visible intensity. Gran Risa, considered one of the most technically demanding giant slalom courses in the world, reveals its character only when seen up close. Its steep pitch and compressed transitions punish imbalance. During the race, attention extends beyond athletes to weather data, snow texture and light conditions. The flyby of the Frece Tricolori adds drama, yet even this moment reflects discipline rather than display, echoing the region's respect for precision.

Perhaps the most telling experience comes before the crowds arrive. SunRisa, the early-morning skiing programme, opens selected slopes at dawn. Perfectly prepared pistes, complete silence and a functional alpine breakfast redefine exclusivity. This is not a curated show but a working morning, briefly shared with visitors. It offers a glimpse of how Alta Badia operates when it is not performing.



Gran Risa is one of the three most technically demanding giant slalom courses on the World Cup circuit, with a top slope incline nearing 34.6 degrees and a competitive course length of about 1.225 km from start to finish.



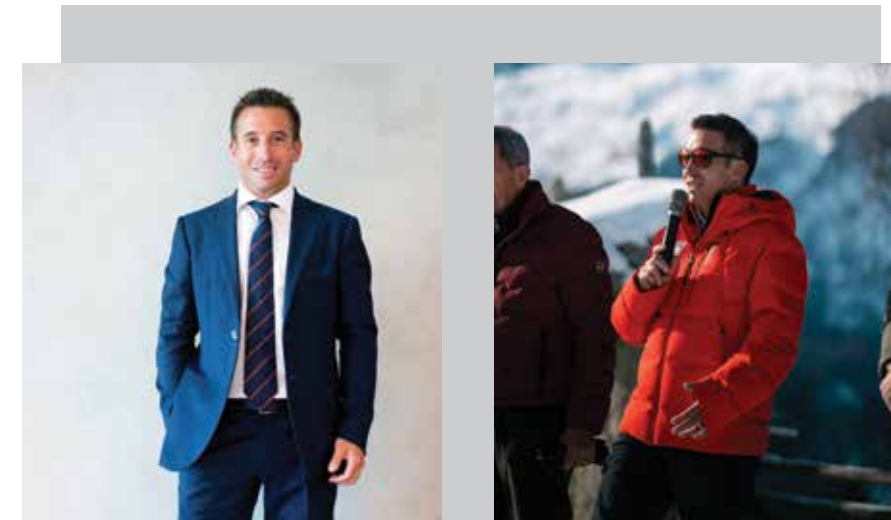
Marco Schwarz reigns on Gran Risa. The Austrian claims the 40th anniversary Alta Badia giant slalom, his first win in nearly two years. Braathen is second, O.18 back, Brennsteiner third.

Gran Risa has hosted men's World Cup races continuously since 1985, making it one of the longest-standing technical venues on the alpine calendar.

The area's villages — Corvara, Colfosco, La Val, San Cassiano, La Villa and Badia — retain distinct Ladin cultural identities, with place names reflecting ancient linguistic roots unique to the Dolomites



The Dolomites surrounding Alta Badia were formed over 200 million years ago from ancient coral reefs, earning UNESCO World Heritage status.



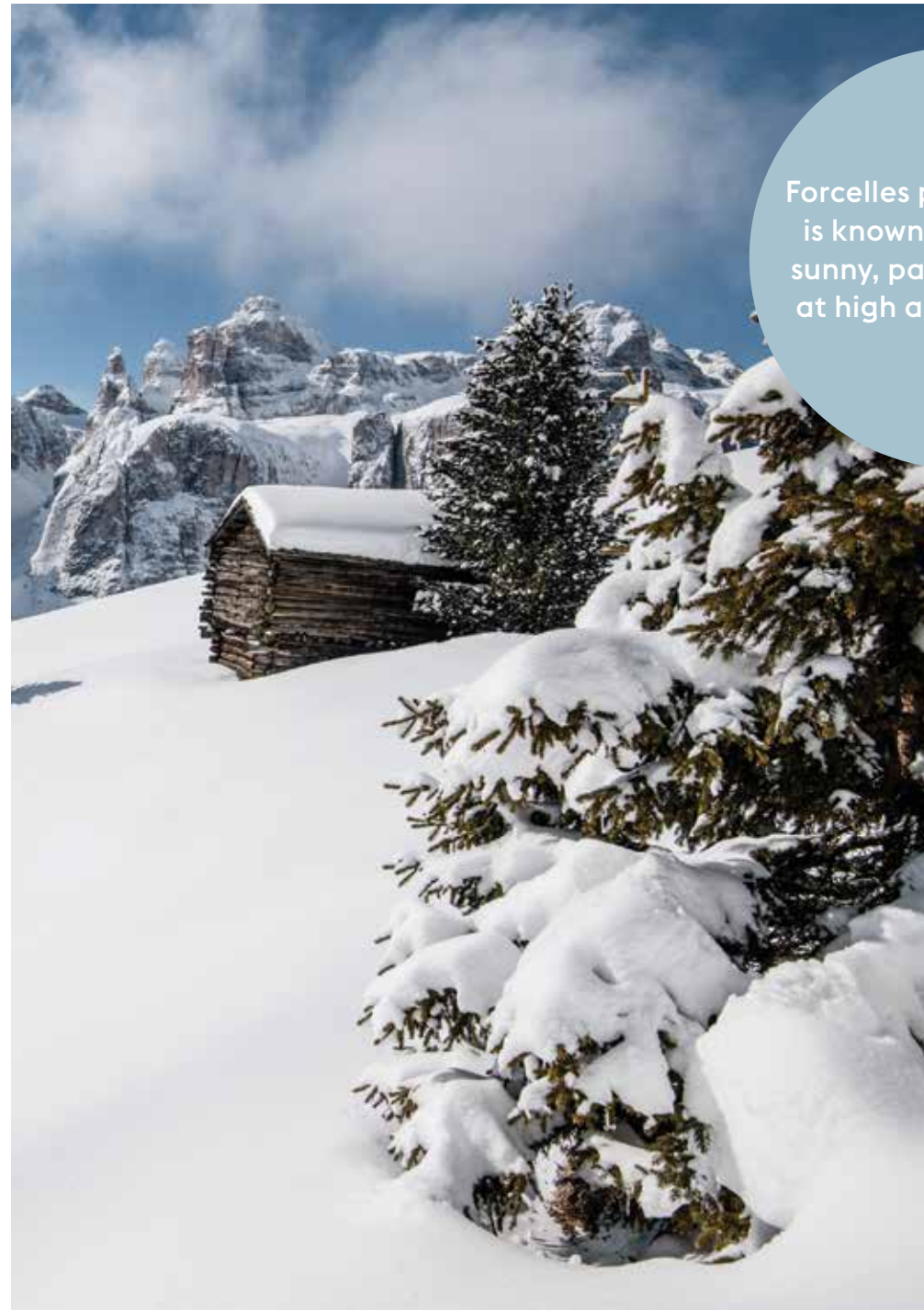
THE MAN BEHIND ALTA BADIA'S PRECISION

Andy Varallo represents the third generation of a local Alpine leadership model built on infrastructure rather than visibility. His family's involvement in Alta Badia dates back to the immediate post-war period, when tourism in the Dolomites was still experimental. In 1946, Leitner was not yet a lift manufacturer but an agricultural machinery company producing tractors. It was in Alta Badia that Leitner built its first ski lift in Italy, in collaboration with Varallo's grandfather, marking the beginning of mechanised alpine access in the valley.

That early partnership laid the foundations for a lift and snowmaking ecosystem that would grow alongside the resort itself. Varallo belongs to a rare category of alpine leaders who understand infrastructure as culture. Long before holding senior roles within Alta Badia and Dolomiti Superski, he worked across operational layers of the business, gaining firsthand knowledge of lifts, slopes, snow logistics and seasonal rhythms. This technical grounding continues to shape his leadership style, which prioritizes systems over visibility. Today, as president of the Alta Badia World Cup Organising Committee and the president of Dolomiti Superski, Varallo oversees a system known for precision rather than scale. Under his leadership, Alta Badia has become a benchmark for race reliability, operational coordination and infrastructure efficiency, balancing international sporting demands with local ownership and long-term resilience.



Filippo Barbero, former pilot of the Frece Tricolori, brings an aviator's discipline to the slopes. His approach prioritises anticipation, alignment and control, revealing how precision in the air translates naturally to movement in alpine terrain.



Forcelles plateau terrain is known for unusually sunny, panoramic views at high alpine altitude.

The region's lift system comprises 53 modern chairlifts and cable cars, designed to keep queues minimal and connect terrain efficiently from beginner zones to scenic high ridges.



Alta Badia connects into the Dolomiti Superski network, one of the world's largest ski carousels with more than 1,200 km of interconnected slopes and 450 lifts on a single pass.



Alta Badia's ski culture remains deeply rooted in generational local stewardship — small family farms and alpine huts still operate seasonally alongside advanced tourism infrastructure.

SunRisa allows skiing on selected slopes before public opening, using the same grooming standards applied to World Cup race preparation.



By the end of the stay, the World Cup feels less like a standalone event than the visible peak of an otherwise continuous process. Alta Badia does not build itself around moments of attention. It refines systems, trains people and trusts that quality will reveal itself naturally. The race is simply when the world happens to be watching. What ultimately distinguishes Alta Badia is continuity. The same systems that support elite competition also sustain daily skiing, local livelihoods and long-term planning. Ownership structures remain closely tied to the valley, ensuring decisions balance innovation with preservation. Investment focuses on efficiency and resilience rather than expansion, allowing the resort to adapt without overreaching.

