



ENDLESS SKIING BENEATH JAGGED LIMESTONE PEAKS ITALY

With the largest network of cable cars in the world, you can ski for days in the stunning and varied terrain of the Italian Alps without ever repeating a run.

From the Dolomites with their world-famous deep gullies to the central massif around Mont Blanc with its high Alpine mountain runs, you will find just about any terrain you can imagine in the Italian Alps. And if your day on the slopes is refined with the finesse of the typical Italian *dolce vita*, then there is nothing left to be desired.

Archaeological finds have shown that ski-like implements were used in Italy as far back as 6,000 years ago. At that time, however, there was no such thing as powder skiing or carving down snowy slopes. During harsh and snowy winters, the wooden planks under foot were simply a means of moving from point A to point B. It wasn't until the 1920s that the sport of skiing began to increase noticeably in popularity. It was also at this time that the first ski lifts were built in the Italian Alps. However, winter sports were considered a luxury back then and were reserved only for the elite. Stays in ski resorts, which were difficult to reach, were expensive because in those days, unlike today's short vacations, people often stayed in the same place for weeks.

The status of skiing as something scarcely accessible to the masses, however, soon began to change. Italian newspapers fueled interest in skiing, racers became celebrities, ski vacations became more affordable, and more and more people began to indulge in the white rush.

This new skiing spirit manifested itself most intensively in a small town named Sestriere in Piedmont,

about 19 miles (30 kilometers) west of Turin. The idea was to create a place that would offer everything a discerning skier's heart could desire. The driving force behind this vision was the Fiat boss Giovanni Agnelli. It was at his behest that ground was broken in 1924 in a previously insignificant patch of land between the Susa and Chisone valleys. Agnelli knew how to skillfully exploit his political network. By 1938, the highway had already been extended to Sestriere and a train station built to bring even more people to the town, situated at an altitude of 6,676 feet (2,035 meters). The people came in droves because the concept of *dolce vita* with an Alpine touch captured the spirit of the times. Even if the atmosphere of Sestriere is not everyone's cup of tea, it would be impossible to imagine Italian skiing history without it. It has hosted more than a hundred FIS Alpine Ski World Cups as well as the FIS World Championships (in 1997), and Italian skiing legend Alberto Tomba won his first World Cup there. Sestriere was also a major venue during the 2006 Winter Olympic Games.

Today, the largest selection of ski areas is not found in western Italy, but in the Dolomites. The highest peak is the Marmolada at 10,968 feet (3,343 meters), and the Dolomites boast well over a dozen peaks that exceed 9,800 feet (3,000 meters). The Dolomites are home to 12 major ski resorts that have combined to form the world's largest multi-resort ski pass—Dolomiti Superski. An incredible 745 miles (1,200 kilometers) of groomed slopes amid an impressive mountain backdrop await skiers. The Dolomiti Superski pass makes seemingly impossible feats possible, such as circumnavigating the world-famous *Sella Ronda*—the ski circuit around the Sella massif with the four Dolomite passes (Campolongo Pass, Pordoi Pass, Sella Pass, and Gardena Pass)—on skis.

The imposing topography of the Dolomites is more than just a backdrop against which you can swish down pristinely groomed slopes. The area has a rugged Alpine feel thanks to its numerous rocky peaks and towers. At first glance, it is difficult to grasp the nuance of the terrain with its countless chutes, couloirs, and bottlenecks, which allow perfect lines to be drawn down into the valley. But with a little patience, a wealth of secrets can be coaxed from the Dolomites. And for those with enough stamina in their thighs to explore this ski world on backcountry gear