



PHOTOS BY RACHEL WALKER

In the Dolomites, an offseason epiphany

With a primed mind, there’s plenty to do in Italy’s famed range

BY RACHEL WALKER
Special to The Washington Post

I had two challenges to overcome when planning a late-May trip to Northern Italy’s Trentino-South Tyrol region: a major snow year and the offseason.

The first meant that the thousands of miles of trails in the rugged Dolomite mountains were still buried. The second meant that many of the high-alpine refugios, famed for hearty food and rustic lodging, were closed between winter and summer. One more thing — I arrived in the rain and the forecast called for more storms throughout my trip. For a trail runner eager to spend the night at staffed mountain huts while completing a multiday traverse, things looked grim.

At least, that was my initial reaction. Then I connected with Sandro de Zolt, an internationally certified mountain guide and a gear tester for La Sportiva, the outdoor footwear and apparel company based in Val di Fiemme, a narrow valley at the base of the Dolomites where mountains loom over storied pine forests. Sandro was born and raised in a military station at Passo Rolle, where he learned to ski at 2 and was scaling the mammoth cliffs of his backyard with his father at 7.

Nothing to do in his home stomping grounds in May? Pshaw.

DOLOMITES CONTINUED ON F4



TOP: Sometimes referred to as the “Matterhorn of the Dolomites,” Cimon della Pala is the best known peak of a group of mountains called the Pale di San Martino. **ABOVE:** On the summit of Monte Castellazzo, hikers may discover a pensive sculpture of Jesus and a cross.

Worth a peak: Mountains, wildflowers and the deep on one sojourn

BY ERIN E. WILLIAMS
Special to The Washington Post

We were on top of the world at the bottom of the world, encircled by a 360-degree panorama of mountain peaks. My husband and I had reached Key Summit, the pinnacle of a half-day hike in New Zealand’s Fiordland National Park. I wanted to lollygag and drink in the views, but the weather had other ideas. The temperature plummeted about 30 degrees and a blustery wind threatened to whisk us away. Andrew and I started back down the path. With bent heads, we pushed through the wind — extreme for us, but weather as usual for a Kiwi.

Key Summit is one of many hiking trails — or as locals call

them, tracks — that crisscross the South Island near Milford Sound, the green gemstone atop New Zealand’s wilderness crown. Milford Sound sits within Fiordland National Park, which in turn is part of Te Wahipounamu — South West New Zealand, a UNESCO World Heritage site that covers 10 percent of the country’s landmass.

Milford Sound’s mountains, rain forests and its fjord draw more than 500,000 visitors each year. Many of them are tour bus day-trippers from neighboring Te Anau or Queenstown who take a quick boat cruise, snap photos and head back to town. A landing strip and helipad accommodate sightseers who forgo the drive and whiz in and out. One lodge is available to those who



ERIN E. WILLIAMS

At New Zealand’s Milford Sound, a cruise boat awaits its passengers. More than 500,000 visitors arrive there each year.

prefer to stay a little longer.

Andrew and I chose a different option: driving a rental car and pitching our tent. This provided us with maximum flexibility to experience this famous landscape without the infamous crowds — from ascending mountaintops to descending below the water’s surface to float among deep-sea creatures.

To reach Milford Sound, we departed our hostel in Te Anau, a nearby lakeside town, and hit the road: the Milford Road, or State Highway 94, which is the only land-based route. We left before sunrise to allow enough time to make our 9 a.m. Milford Sound cruise departure.

The nearly 75-mile journey

HIKING CONTINUED ON F3

NAVIGATOR

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DINING

Where to eat breakfast, lunch and dinner in Richmond. **F2**

GEORGIA

Layover at the Atlanta airport? Check out the Delta Flight Museum. **F5**

