

Paradise at Preidlhof

Lisa Starr made the trip to the South Tyrol to meet Patrizia Bortolin and experience the award-winning Preidlhof resort

Departing the autostrada at Bolzano in the South Tyrol, you begin a series of twists and turns through deep valleys with the Italian Alps rising on either side. The air is crisp and clear and the valley floor is planted with apple trees that have supplanted the grapevines you see further south.

Road signs and business names are in German and churches and buildings have the chalet-inspired design of their northern neighbour, making it easy to forget you're still in Italy.



“ Preidlhof was first in the world to get ISO 17679 certification – the international standard for wellness spa services ”

Guests enjoy Kneipp therapy in the outdoor relaxation garden



Sleep pods in the spa at Preidlhof

PHOTO: PREIDLHOF

Fifteen minutes past Merano you arrive in the sweet town of Naturns and a few turns past the church is the entrance to the Preidlhof luxury resort, where you're greeted with prosecco and nibbles and a warm Italian welcome.

Nestled among lemon, olive and cypress trees near the 46th parallel north, the micro-climate sees palm trees juxtaposed with snow-covered mountains.

Journey of discovery

Preidlhof's lotus flower-inspired logo turns out to be an apt metaphor, as the property reveals itself gradually. Spread over three buildings, it has 71 rooms and suites and 5,000sq m of wellness space, including a spa with 14 treatment rooms, six swimming pools, five hydrotherapy pools, a medical spa and a sauna tower with 16 steam, sauna and relaxation spaces.

Preidlhof was opened in 1966 by the Ladurner family, three generations of which are still involved with the resort, but it was the arrival of spa director Patrizia Bortolin in 2019 that sparked the blossoming of the wellness offering.



PHOTO: PREIDLHOF

Patrizia Bortolin (second from left) is a master of spa design and delivery. Pictured here with her transformational wellness team, who deliver many unique therapies at Preidlhof

FIRST PERSON

► Twelve transformational wellness retreats were added, offering signature rituals and treatments, fitness and beauty concepts and a wellness VIP lounge, as well as a signature food philosophy and menu.

Already a multi-award-winner, in 2020 the resort was the first in the world to get ISO 17679 certification – the international standard for wellness spa services (www.spabusiness.com/ISO17679).

The stay

Rooms in the Dolce Vita Lodge are modern and well-equipped, with a cafe table and seating area, enticing mini-bar, flat-screen tv and expansive bathroom. But my favourite feature was the large balcony with daybed. I transferred my duvet and slept out there, listening to the quiet sounds of nature and waking with the sun coming over the Dolomites – absolutely wonderful! Fluffy robes, slippers, spa bags and backpacks are also provided for use throughout your stay.

In addition, different bed systems, mattress toppers and pillows are available, and if needed, a relaxation basket with sleep aids can be delivered to your room. Perhaps the feature most helpful to sleep is that the resort turns off the WLAN antennas at night, so you're not tempted to turn on your devices.



Relaxing in the Sauna Tower

PHOTO: PREIDHOF



Dr Angerer (left) is Priedhof's resident medical physician

PHOTO: PREIDHOF

About

Dr Alexander Angerer

Dr Angerer grew up near Preidhof, in the Vinschgau Valley and says from an early age he was fascinated with the health benefits gained from the water cures and teas made from local herbs and botanicals.

Now, in his role as Preidhof's resident medical physician, he establishes evidence-based facts about each patient before using homeopathic remedies and traditional medicine to help to reinstate a balance of their body, mind and spirit.

Current specialities include oral therapy, infusion therapy and magnetic field therapy.



The 'wall of love' where guests leave affirmations

PHOTO: PREIDHOF

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The walk to the spa has engaging features, such as a 'wall of love' with messages written by guests

Off to the spa

The walk from the lodge to the spa can be navigated entirely indoors but can be a little confusing, as they're on different levels and several hallways are involved. However, on the plus side, each transition area has engaging features, such as a 'wall of love' with messages written by guests.

The 14-treatment room spa is adjacent to a lovely outdoor relaxation garden with pools and a sauna. The large reception is filled with natural light, offering tea and water and displaying retail options from Comfort Zone, Su-man, Terme di Comano and Lehalani. Bortolin is also busy finalising the development of a signature Preidhof product line for professional use and to retail at the resort.

The facility showcases the excellence of a Bortolin-created spa and wellness centre and each treatment is a true experience, as delivered by her well-trained team. The menu is augmented with unusual and bespoke services, such as ammo tuina, osteo-balancing and sleep massages and Ayurvedic options. I enjoyed an ancient healing session in which practitioner Martin Kirchler built on TCM and whole-body practices to integrate massage with breathwork and movement.

A zen shiatsu session with Andrea Martinelli used meridian work to gently clear imbalances, while

an excellent lifting effect facial definitely worked as advertised. However, the most impactful spa treatment was a 'glowing flow' session with healer Stefano Battaglia, who used both conversation and hands-on bodywork to release emotional blocks and correct imbalances, leaving me in joyful tears.

Wellness offerings

For guests who want to enjoy wellness treatments at their own pace, the sauna tower is a wonderful way to while away a few hours. The six-story building provides beautiful views at every level and guests can take advantage of multiple steam and sauna experiences, some clothed and others not, as well as relaxation areas, lockers and showers and an open-air rooftop pool.

The deep-sea room promotes relaxation through a three-dimensional sensory experience lasting 20 minutes, while sauna masters are on hand to provide aufguss experiences at scheduled times and robust and healthy snacks are available throughout the day, along with tea, water and juices.

There are so many nooks and crannies with delightful relaxation elements around the property that it was impossible to discover let alone enjoy them all during the three days of my visit. ►

The resort offers crisp, clear air, and spectacular views of the Italian alps

PHOTO: PREIDHOF



► **Medical options**

The goal is to provide every guest with personal, holistic regeneration that harnesses medical, complementary and preventive health approaches.

If you're hoping to improve your wellness from a quantitative perspective, the Preidl Med Spa awaits, under the direction of Dr Alexander Angerer, a complementary medicine physician. Here you can experience a range of services, from TCM and meridian diagnosis, to DNA tests, acupuncture and aesthetic medicine.

I had a heart rate variability test, which – along with giving readouts on aura, energy and brain frequencies – also determined that my biological age was 44, which I was quite happy about!

Whether you want to address your health and wellness from a data-driven, a sensory or an emotional perspective, Preidlhof has the bases

covered. The signature concept, created by Bortolin, aims to balance hedonic (emotional) and eudaimonic (purposeful) wellbeing, as she explains: "Our goal is to promote a lifestyle with a hedonic approach to the present and to savour it, while also bringing a eudaimonic approach to the past and the future, to make them count."

Heading outdoors

Opportunities for outdoor wellness abound. The valley supplies most of Italy's apples and guests can enjoy an 'apple journey' with neuropsychologist and fitness trainer, Norma Jean Botticelli. This one-on-one experience showcases different apple varieties, which Botticelli uses to encourage guests to slow down and appreciate texture, aroma and taste in the act of mindful eating.



Guests collect botanical samples and make a personalised smoke bath with barks and resins and enjoy a refreshing drink direct from the mountain stream

Bortolin – herself a trained transformational wellness coach – also offers a sensorial wellbeing consultation, during which essential oils are used in an associative process to help guests identify potential growth areas in their personal life.

My favourite outdoor experience, however, was the forest bathing walk during which guests are accompanied by 74-year-old local, Irmgard Moosmair, who leads the way from the resort down across the river at the valley floor, pointing out local flora and fauna along the way.

Guests collect botanical samples and make a personalised smoke bath with barks and resins and enjoy a refreshing drink direct from the mountain stream before heading back to Preidlhof. This experience recently won second prize in the Holistic Treatment of the Year Award 2021 from online platform Destination Deluxe.

A daily bulletin details numerous additional hikes, walks, fitness activities and entertainment, but as the property is located adjacent to a nature park, you don't necessarily need an organised activity to explore the trails and outdoor spaces, it's just difficult to find the time with so much on offer!

Time to dine

The cuisine is a highlight of any wellness experience and Preidlhof doesn't disappoint. The restaurant has been awarded three toques from Gault Millau and there are local and regional menu options, some of which use ingredients grown and harvested on-site.

Breakfast and lunch buffets are expansive, while dinner is served a la carte from a wide selection of options and cocktails and wine are available for an extra fee. There are several dining rooms that also spill onto outdoor terraces – weather permitting – and you can elect to dine in a VIP



PHOTO: JASMINUEBER

Ilgard Moosmair leads award winning forest bathing walks

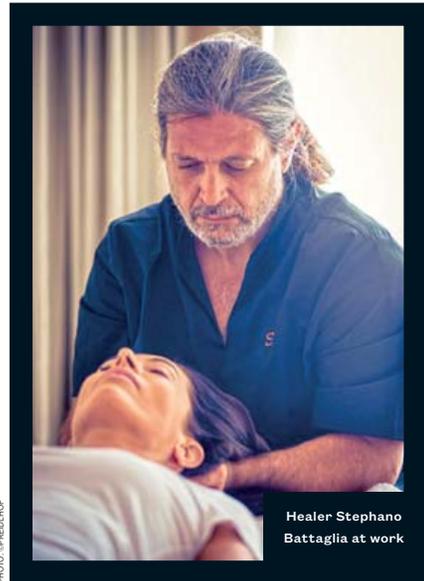
The menopause retreat

Preidlhof is one of the first international destination resorts to offer a menopause retreat. This six-day experience comprises a choice of treatments and activities, which include massages and baths, as well as classes, consultations and wellness events.

On arrival, attendees receive a medical wellness evaluation and heart rate variability test, as well as either sleep measurement analysis or acupuncture sessions, depending on their needs.

The retreat includes carefully-planned nutritional meals and six prescribed classes, including yoga nidra, mindful eating and laughter yoga, together with optional transformational dance, sound healing and forest bathing activities.

Retreat attendees say the experience has made a real impact on their state of wellbeing. For example, one attendee said that, after her retreat, her energy levels were back up to the same levels experienced before her menopause began.



Healer Stephano Battaglia at work

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The most impactful treatment was a ‘glowing flow’ session with healer Stefano Battaglia, who used conversation and bodywork to release emotional blocks, leaving me in joyful tears

PHOTO: PREIDLHOF



Resort guests enjoy a choice of six swimming pools

► Wellness Lounge at private tables that look out over the delightful countryside.

For a special treat, you can partake of a wellness healing gourmet dinner menu, which changes nightly and offers seven-courses without soy, egg, lactose, added sugars or gluten.

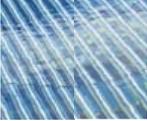
In line with its sustainability policy, which has been developed to preserve and respect the beautiful local environment, much of the food is sourced locally to create zero carbon dining options. In addition to this, the property harnesses solar power to heat the pools while using biodegradable detergents and energy-saving light bulbs. Most of the furniture is made with locally sourced materials and Preidlhof is also a plastic-free environment.

The financials

The spa alone exceeds €1m (£857,200, US\$1.3m) per year in revenue, driven by an impressive therapist utilisation rate which Bortolin expects to hit 90 per cent in 2022.

Spa and wellness treatment prices at Preidlhof are quite affordable, driving this volume, as they range from €45 to €250 (£38 - £214, US\$51 - US\$286).

Room rates vary throughout the year from €196 (£167, US\$224) per night in the low season to €277 (£217, US\$317) in the high season, with certain suites and penthouses priced somewhat higher.



Themed retreats of four to seven days are priced between €488 and €1,587 (£413 - £1,343, US\$551 - US\$1,792) - plus the price of the hotel stay - and include an array of spa, fitness and medical treatments.

A newly-launched six-day (minimum stay) menopause retreat costs €1,587 (£1,343, US\$1,792) plus accommodation, and includes ancient healing and glowing flow sessions as well as a medical consultation.

The people

A special mention must be given to the excellent staff; at Preidlhof. I was travelling with an elderly cousin and the team sprang into action any time she needed anything.

Although traditional spa treatments can always be personalised with special touches and rituals, Preidlhof is a perfect example of how to step things up to another level by combining the highest standards of hospitality with fun and unusual experiences that are unique to the property. It helps to have a story-book setting, but we know in spa that ultimately it's the people that make the experience and I, for one, can't wait to return. ●



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Medicinal mineral bathing

Preidlhof has introduced a new medicinal bathing offering, following a five-year project.

Costing €2m (US\$2.26m, £1.7m), the new hydrotherapy experience comprises an 80sq m indoor pool and a selection of private whirlpool baths.

All are filled with mineral-rich water sourced from a 400-year-old spring located under Naturno's Reinhold Messner Castle, 5km from the resort.

The upgrade is fitting for Preidlhof, as Naturno is only a 20-minute drive from the famed Italian spa town of Merano that's home to a host of public bathing facilities powered by its famous healing waters.

“This project is the result of an independent, combined community initiative led by the local hospitality industry,” says Patrizia Bortolin.

Bortolin has curated new spa programming, incorporating the medicinal baths with highlights including private bathing experiences in the whirlpools infused with detox or regenerative bath oil blends, inspired by the traditional Merano bathing ritual.



Living like this has healed my life and helped me unlock my professional potential

Patrizia Bortolin

Lisa Starr talks to the award winning visionary who's injecting new vigour into Preidlhof



Bortolin says her life is '24-hour wellness research'

What have been the highs and lows so far?

The resort was already an extremely successful wellness retreat for couples and leisure guests, mainly from German-speaking markets, but owners, Klaus and Monika Ladurner, are very interested in health, medicine and wellness that improves lifestyle and as a result, my brief was to create a meaningful wellness philosophy that could showcase treatments and overall wellness as the main reasons to come to Preidlhof. My aim was to also create a framework for our offering and make it more appealing for international guests.

What's the starting point for any change?

It depends whether it's a new-build or an existing location, but generally after staying a couple of days I can sense the main direction that should be taken to express its potential.

How do you know when you're happy a property is finally where you want it to be?

I'm extremely creative and my life is 24-hour wellness research, always tuned and updated, so once the flow of creativity starts it goes far and fast - I then adapt to the limitations of the project, whether resource, space or budget.

When it comes to creativity and concept development I sometimes dream of working with an unlimited budget, as in my mind, I feel there is always more that can be achieved.

When it comes to execution, I benefit from logistics, management, marketing and people skills.

Everything is in a state of continuous change for me - development never stops until I see and feel coherence, flowing operations, strong results from guests and effective sales and marketing actions.

When living and working in the place feels positive,

inspiring and seems peaceful for guests and the team, at that point I can call myself happy.

What's your process for discovering a property's essence and then building out its spa menu?

This is my favourite part, it's pure creativity and intuition, combined with experience in travel, hospitality and wellness.

My process is 'idea-research-study-design-develop-trial-go-live' and my aim is to use my love for the spa world and my deep trust in holistic therapies to bring everything to life. I once saw a quote I love that captures this. It comes from a dialogue between Socrates, Phaedrus and Eupalinos during which Eupalinos refers to buildings which are 'mute', some which 'speak' and others which 'sing'.

Where do you get your inspiration?

Spirituality permeates my life and gives me the capacity to think, be mindful of and receptive to the environment and people, and to develop my social intelligence and get in touch with my talents.

I now live more in the flow, connecting the inside and outside and seeing things in perspective. Living like this has healed my life and helped me unlock my professional potential. When my daily creative flow can't be expressed in my work, I use it to cook, to play, to draw, to dream and to coach friends and colleagues ... otherwise I get stuck.

I enjoy meeting new people who inspire my mind and fill my soul, as well as observing guests and talking to them, which also gives me precious information. I'm also obsessed with the experiential side of life and never stop studying, so I'm developing a rich background of knowledge that pops up unexpectedly with new connections and ideas. ●