

FOOD

and

TRAVEL

SEASON'S EATINGS

Festive food, drinks, recipes and more...

CHEFS

Michael Caines
Marcus Wareing
Giorgio Locatelli
Michel Roux Jr
Mark Hix

Bolivia

Cooking with altitude

Stuttgart's
Christmas markets

Hottest beach villas for

WINTER SUN

JERUSALEM

Biblical portions

Ski savvy

Hit the best slopes for less – and avoid the crowds

48hrs

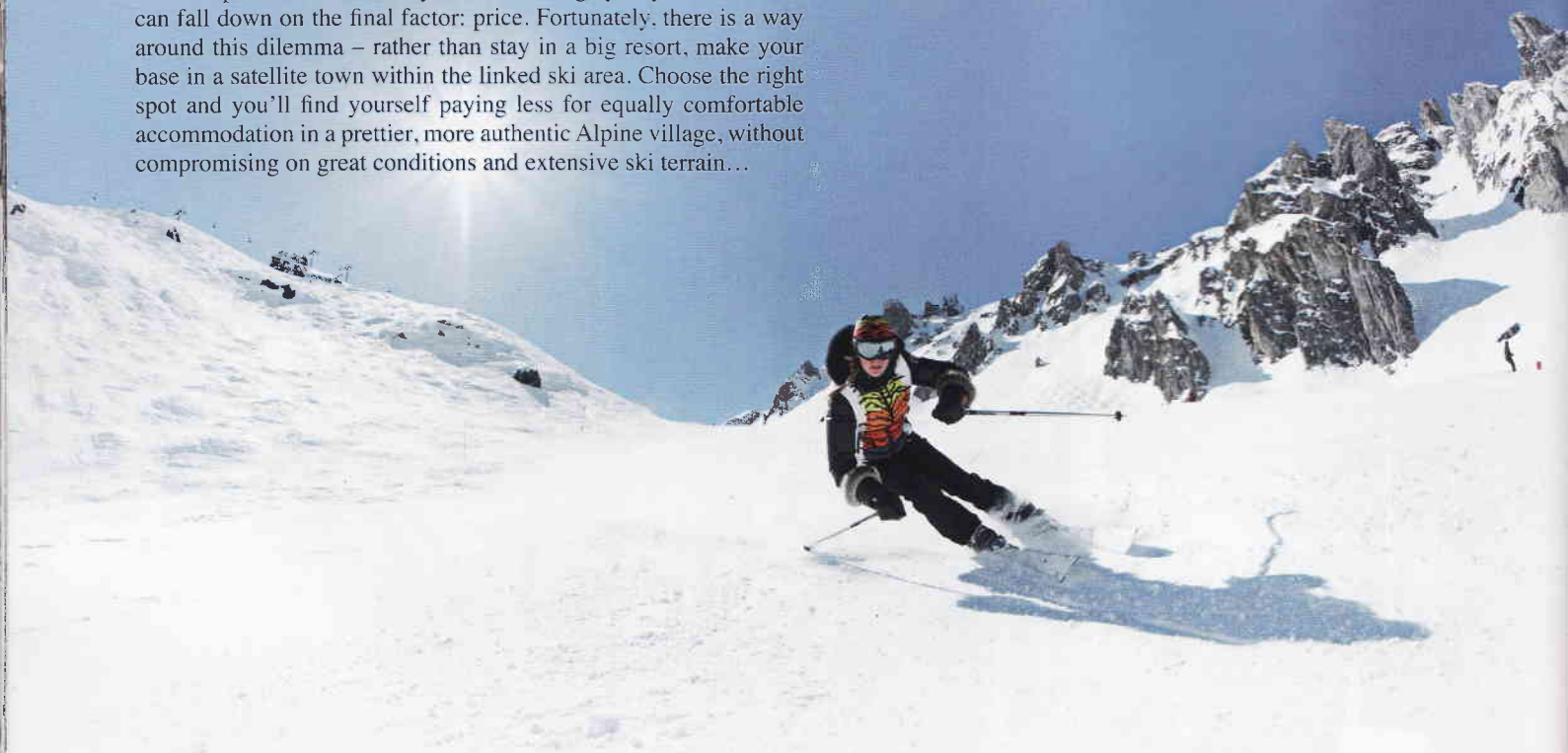
Guangzhou and Wellington

DECEMBER 2013 £3.95



Restaurants **Wines** **Weekends away** **Recipes** **Places to stay** **Activities**

As resorts across the world expand their lift systems and link up with neighbouring ski areas, picking out those with access to hundreds of diverse pistes and acres of off-piste terrain has become easy. However, the crowds descending on the big name resorts in these areas – Verbier, Courchevel and St Anton, for example – often mean they lack something by way of charm, and can fall down on the final factor: price. Fortunately, there is a way around this dilemma – rather than stay in a big resort, make your base in a satellite town within the linked ski area. Choose the right spot and you'll find yourself paying less for equally comfortable accommodation in a prettier, more authentic Alpine village, without compromising on great conditions and extensive ski terrain...



Want to get stuck into the season's best skiing but fancy a resort away from the crowds? Gabriella Le Breton finds the best smaller towns in which to base yourself, which offer a more authentic experience, often at a better price – but with access to the same slopes

HEADING OFF PISTE

S K I S N O W B O A R D S K I S N O W B O A R D



ACTIVE TRAVELLER

Opposite: make Chalet Floralie in Saint Martin de Belleville your base for exploring the extensive pistes of the Three Valleys

Saint Martin de Belleville FRANCE

This old Savoyard village may be linked by lift to one of the world's largest and best-known ski areas – the **Three Valleys** – but it has retained every bit of its authenticity. A welcome antidote to the glitz of Courchevel, party scene of Méribel and brutal architecture of Val Thorens, St Martin is essentially a cluster of ancient timber chalets and a pretty church. While some of the buildings still house their original bovine tenants, others have been converted into luxurious chalets and atmospheric little restaurants.

The best such restaurant is Le Montagnard (*le-montagnard.com*), which is located in an old hayloft and owned by local cheese-maker Eric Suchet. It's the perfect spot for cosy lunches and dinners, particularly if you enjoy Savoyard specialities such

as *tartiflette*, *croziflette* and *raclette*. You can dine in similarly rustic style on the mountain, at the delightful Chez Pépé Nicolas (*chezpepenicolas.com*), which is tucked away on the slopes just above Les Menuires. The croque monsieur Belleville, laden with turkey and home-made Tomme de Savoie, will set you up for the ski back to St Martin and is best enjoyed on the sun-drenched terrace with its panoramic views.

THE DETAIL The Oxford Ski Company (*oxfordski.com*) offers six nights (seven days catered) at the luxurious Chalet Floralie, which is located just steps away from the lifts, from £900pp and can also arrange flights and private transfers. A six-day ski pass for the Three Valleys ski area costs £220. —————>>

S K I S N O W B O A R D S K I S N O W B O A R D



Kirchberg AUSTRIA

Located just six kilometres by road from its glossy neighbour **Kitzbühel**, Kirchberg is a lively village that's a welcome retreat for families and dedicated skiers. The shared Kitzbühel-Kirchberg ski area offers 168km of pistes accessed by a modern lift network, a sizeable terrain park and more than 40 mountain restaurants. But that's not all – the village is also ideally placed for exploring SkiWelt Wilder Kaiser-Brixental, Austria's largest interconnected ski area, with some 280km of pistes. A short free bus ride will take you to Brixen, one of the area's main hubs.

Kitzbühel may lay claim to some of Austria's glitziest hotels and restaurants but locals often head to Kirchberg for a culinary

treat at the award-winning Restaurant 'R Simon Taxacher' in the contemporary 26-room Rosengarten Hotel. Taxacher is fêted as one of Austria's finest and most innovative chefs, with a signature style that blends contemporary Mediterranean and traditional Tyrolean cuisine. Fortunately, there are plenty of pistes to burn up around Kirchberg to warrant the indulgence of the Rosengarten's bedside breakfasts and lavish dinners.

THE DETAIL Alpine Answers (alpineanswers.co.uk) offers seven nights' B&B at Rosengarten Hotel from £1,050pp, including flights and shared resort transfers. A six-day ski pass for the Kitzbühel-Kirchberg area costs £215.



S K I S N O W B O A R D S K I S N O W B O A R D



Nendaz SWITZERLAND

Over the years, **Verbier** has become a cult destination for off-pisteskiers, partygoers and luxury chalet lovers. Indeed, Verbier's proliferation of glamorous restaurants, palatial chalets and infamous nightclubs is only matched by the hardcore nature of the skiing to be found on the slopes that rise above it. Fortunately for those of us who don't automatically grab a harness and ice-pick on our way to the pistes, Verbier is one of five resorts that make up the Four Valleys ski area, which incorporates over 400km of pistes suitable for all abilities.

The attractive town of Nendaz is located in one of those four valleys and, with its old town, easy airport access and well-priced chalets and apartments, is gaining a reputation as 'the thinking man's Verbier'. What Nendaz lacks in sushi and celebrities it makes up for with homely restaurants, quiet local

slopes and excellent family facilities. And, while Verbier sits on the fringes of the Four Valleys, Nendaz is located centrally within it, encouraging further exploration of the great red runs around Veysonnaz and classic off-piste routes near Siviez and Tartin. Nendaz offers a wide selection of restaurants and shops, making self-catered accommodation a good choice. But be sure to treat yourself to at least one night out at Le Mont Rouge restaurant (00 41 79 634 4962), which serves succulent, locally farmed lamb rumoured to be better than anything in Verbier.

THE DETAIL Ted Bentley (tedbentley.co.uk) offers two spacious, well-located and beautifully appointed chalets (each sleeps eight to nine) located in Nendaz, available from £1,799 per week on a self-catered basis. A six-day ski pass for the whole of the Four Valleys costs £245.

Opposite: (top) well-connected Kirchberg also has great food from Simon Taxacher at Rosengarten Hotel; (bottom) chalet chic at Nendaz in the heart of the Four Valleys. This page: Savoyard charm in Morzine, perfect for the Portes du Soleil ski area



S K I S N O W B O A R D S K I S N O W B O A R D

Morzine **FRANCE**

Despite linking 650km of pistes and 12 resorts on either side of the French-Swiss border – many of which are only an hour's drive from Geneva – the **Portes du Soleil** ski area somehow flies under the radar of many British skiers. Its skiing ranges from gentle, spruce-lined trails to hair-raising couloirs, and from some of the best terrain parks in the Alps to seemingly endless cruising runs. The towns are just as diverse, from high-altitude, sci-fi film set Avoriaz to the deeply traditional Swiss hamlet of Morgins.

The town of Morzine blends Savoyard farming village charm with a wide choice of contemporary hotels, restaurants and bars, and is perfectly located for Portes du Soleil, with lifts stretching out in virtually every direction. Enjoy a morning coffee and slab

of blueberry tart at La Terrasse (00 33 450 741617), one of the rustic mountain restaurants in the hamlet of Les Lindarets, pop across to Switzerland for fondue and home-smoked meats at Lapisa (00 41 24 479 3643) near Champéry, and enjoy live music and après-ski on the terrace of Le Tavaillon in Avoriaz before heading back to Morzine. After a soak in the hot tub at family run Le Petit Dru hotel, join the locals for dinner at Le Pique-Feu, a delicatessen that transforms into an informal restaurant at night. **THE DETAIL** Peak Retreats (peakretreats.co.uk) offers seven nights' half board at Le Petit Dru from £734pp, including a flexible return via Eurotunnel. A six-day ski pass for the Portes du Soleil area costs from £175. »



ACTIVE TRAVELLER

Hitting the Dolomites' slopes via La Villa, whose nearby attractions include the refuge and church at Santa Croce (opposite, top). Opposite, bottom: pretty Stuben was home to a ski pioneer



S K I S N O W B O A R D S K I S N O W B O A R D

La Villa ITALY

La Villa is one of six towns clustered together in Alta Badia, in the heart of the Dolomites. Alta Badia forms the largest corner of the Sella Ronda ski area, with 130km of local slopes, which in turn is part of the vast **Dolomiti Superski** area (a whopping 1,200km of pistes). The quality and range of skiing here is world-class, with scenery so exceptional it lures even the most dedicated skiers off the slopes and onto sunny terraces to marvel at it. This is where the South Tyrol's Italian heritage outweighs its Austrian roots: the pace of piste life is languorous, with the sense that skiing is a means of getting between restaurants for coffee, lunch and après-ski rather than an endeavour worthy of much physical exertion.

La dolce vita continues off the slopes, with fur-clad Italians taking their evening

strolls past sumptuous hotels and restaurants (three of which boast Michelin stars), as well as chic spas, bars and boutiques. La Villa is one of Alta Badia's smaller villages, yet several lifts depart from its heart, whisking you into the extensive ski area. Be sure to take the lift to reach one of the most delightful mountain refuges in the Alps: Santa Croce (00 39 0471 839632), built in 1718 as a hostel for pilgrims visiting the pretty chapel next door. Both take their name from the mountain at whose feet they lie. Lit by candles and warmed by open fires, the refuge serves the best *Kaiserschmarrn* (sweet pancake) outside of Austria.

THE DETAIL Inghams (ingham.co.uk) offers seven nights (six of them catered) at Chalet Hotel Al Pigher from £477pp, including flights and shared transfers. A six-day ski pass for the Dolomiti Superski area costs £179.





SKI SNOW BOARD SKI SNOW BOARD

Stuben **AUSTRIA**

Arlberg is undisputedly one of the world's leading ski areas, its visitors taking advantage of one of the best snow records in the Alps, 340km of pistes and 200km of off-piste terrain. Incorporating several towns and villages, St Anton is the area's poster resort, known throughout the ski world as the home of gnarly freeskiers and some lively après-ski thanks to the infamous MooserWirt and Krazy Kanguruh bars.

Located about 40 minutes' ski from St Anton, the picturesque village of Stuben was the birthplace of Johann 'Hannes' Schneider, who pioneered the Arlberg technique of downhill skiing and tuition as we know it today. Soak up the atmosphere on the Hotel Post's sunny terrace or in the wood-panelled *Stube*, a cosy private dining room (00 43 5582 761). Given its position in the heart of some of Arlberg's best off-piste terrain,

and the presence of the Alpin & Freeride Center, Stuben is a great choice for serious off-piste skiers and riders.

Gastronomes should also note that Stuben is home to the excellent Hotel Mondschein (mondschein.com), owned by the husband and wife team Markus Kegele and Eva-Maria Kegele-Walch. The pair have long been advocates of slow food cooking and practices, and farm, hunt and prepare most of their own produce. Not just that, but Eva-Maria is one of Austria's most highly regarded sommeliers, overseeing a remarkably well-stocked 17th-century wine cellar.

THE DETAIL Kaluma Travel (kalumatravel.co.uk) offers seven nights' half board at Hotel Mondschein from £1,152pp, including flights, private transfers, a six-day Arlberg lift pass and Kaluma's dedicated concierge service. —————>

'Arlberg is undisputedly one of the world's leading ski areas, its visitors taking advantage of one of the best snow records in the Alps, 340km of pistes and 200km of off-piste terrain'





Left to right: Disentis is a freeriders' paradise; the town itself is overlooked by an ancient monastery



SKI SNOW BOARD SKI SNOW BOARD

Disentis **SWITZERLAND**

Disentis is an archetypal Swiss Alpine town, encircled by towering mountains and glacial lakes, with the added bonus of being home to one of Europe's oldest Benedictine monasteries, the 8th-century St Martin. Until recently, the challenging local terrain has been a closely guarded secret among intrepid freeriders, yet the winds of change are now starting to blow through this sleepy corner of Switzerland.

Disentis boasts 60km of pistes, which are supplemented by the 200km of diverse slopes of the **Gotthard Oberalp Arena** ski area shared by its neighbours, Sedrun and Andermatt. Sedrun is easily reached from Disentis by a 15-minute scenic train ride over the Oberalp pass, with Andermatt located further along the line. Andermatt is the best known of the three resorts and is about to get a lot more famous, as it emerges this winter after

a substantial facelift. The quaint village has been transformed into a luxury resort, with the (ongoing) construction of multiple hotels, restaurants and shops. As part of this transformation, Andermatt's lift system is being extended and, come next winter, the town will be linked by ski lift to Sedrun, expanding its appeal even further.

With Disentis tipped to become the next big thing, skiers looking for superb off-piste skiing and a refreshingly simple village – a good alternative to Andermatt – should make their way there quickly, before Switzerland's best secret gets out.

THE DETAIL Nangijala Guest House (nangijala.ch) was opened last year by an enterprising Scandinavian pair with help from a local architect. Seven nights' B&B costs from £530pp. A six-day ski arena pass costs £179.

Left to right: fun in the snow; boutique bliss at Principe delle Neve in Cervinia, which blends authentic Alpine looks with a sleek, modern design



Valtournenche/Cervinia **ITALY**

Being located on the other side of one of the world's most iconic mountains – the Matterhorn – the Italian town of Cervinia often languishes in the shadow of its better-known Swiss neighbour, **Zermatt**. It's hard to beat Zermatt for village charm – its cobbled streets, centuries-old chalets and horse-drawn carriages are picture postcard material – but Cervinia boasts a convivial, car-free centre with atmospheric pizzerias, wine bars and hotels (notably the chic, boutique Principe delle Neve). If you really want to ensconce yourself in Alpine charm though, consider the even more boutique, 24-room Hotel Les Neiges d'Antan, snuggled in a secluded mountain pasture near Cervinia's lift-linked neighbour, Valtournenche, and ten minutes away by shuttle.

Basing yourself here grants access to Cervinia's local slopes, a 150km-network of beginner and intermediate-friendly pistes

accessed directly from town. But you can also explore the combined 360km of pistes it shares with Zermatt (Matterhorn Ski Paradise). Plumping for an International pass opens up more terrain and mesmerising views, reached by Europe's highest lifts, as well as the opportunity to enjoy one of the world's longest ski runs, a descent of over 20km from the Klein Matterhorn above Zermatt to Valtournenche. And it enables you to nip across the border for lunch at one of Zermatt's celebrated mountain restaurants, such as Chez Vrony (00 41 27 967 2552), which blends Alpine dishes with modern cuisine to perfection.

THE DETAIL Alpine Luxury Chalets (alpineluxurychalets.com) offers seven nights' half board at the Hotel Les Neiges d'Antan from £1,350pp, including flights and private resort transfers. A six-day International ski pass costs £245. □