

POLES APART

When your usual Alpine boltholes are looking a little too much like the beaten track, it's time to go off-piste. Weird and wonderful winters start here

By GABRIELLA LE BRETON



DEPLAR FARM, ICELAND

Deplar Farm is a bubble of luxury in Iceland's elemental landscape of snow-filled valleys and meringue mountains on the rugged shores of the Arctic Ocean. Set in the northerly Troll peninsula, the restored sheep farm retains its traditional black-painted timber exterior and grass roof, balancing the minimalist lines of the contemporary spa, 12 bedrooms, cinema, games room and wine cellar within. Glass walls in the spa and dining room capitalize on the mesmerizing views north to Skagafjörður fjord and south to countless peaks, their snow caps burnished by the Arctic sun.

Owned and operated by the US-based Eleven Experience, Deplar Farm is a place of extremes. A squad of mountain guides is poised to take you heli-skiing beneath the midnight sun, ski-touring through pristine valleys, and making first descents of spaghetti-thin *couloirs*. Fancy après-ski in an infinity hot tub above the ocean? Barney and the gang will get the chopper to call at Hofsó's hot springs on the way back home. Or take your pick of geothermally heated tubs, flotation

tanks, indoor and outdoor swimming pools back at Deplar. Griff, "the kid guy", spoils the children for life, whizzing them up the hills above Deplar with his snowcat, while Alan plots a surprise mulled wine and fireworks party at the old chapel a short snowshoe walk from the farm. elevenexperience.com

HAKUBA, JAPAN

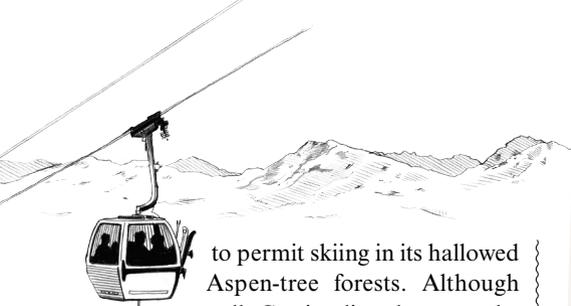
Skiing in Japan is as much a cultural adventure as it is a startlingly different ski experience to that of Europe or North America. The Japanese Alps are a land of sacred forests, hot-tub-loving monkeys, ornate temples and wasabi farms, all doused in some of the world's finest and softest snow thanks to their proximity to the Sea of Japan. Say goodbye to lunches of bland burgers and lashings of lactose and hello to marbled Wagyu beef, panko-breaded oysters and rich *ramen* broths. Replace rowdy jacuzzis with serene *onsen*—traditional hot-spring baths—and exchange European lift-queue bargaining with polite offers of assistance from lift operators in dapper uniforms.

The Hakuba Valley is one of Japan's largest and best-known ski areas, encompassing 11 diverse ski resorts that span some 960 hectares of ski terrain. For the true "Japow" experience, look to tiny Cortina, the first Japanese resort



THE POWDER AND THE GLORY
Top: heli-skiing at Skagafjörður fjord, Iceland. Right: Cortina, Japan

ELEVEN EXPERIENCE (ICELAND); ISTOCK.COM/POJ_JOP (FLAGS); CAMILLA RUTHERFORD (CORTINA)



to permit skiing in its hallowed Aspen-tree forests. Although small, Cortina lies closest to the ocean and thus lays claim to the most snow as well as the steepest terrain and most relaxed attitude to backcountry skiing. Dig deep into the local ski scene and explore the powder fields and glades of Cortina and other Hakuba resorts like Happo-One, Goryu and Otari on a guided safari, combining resort skiing with ski touring. action-outdoors.co.uk

 **RIKSGRÄNSEN, SWEDEN**

Skiing spring snow in the Arctic Circle at midnight should be on every skier's bucket list. There is a dreamlike quality to the Arctic landscape, blushing apricot beneath the low sun with distant fjords shimmering like molten gold, and indulgent *crème brûlée* snow, thick and creamy below a wafer-thin sugary crust. Located deep in Lapland, Riksgränsen is Sweden's northernmost resort, offering skiing late into May or beyond, if you "earn your turns" by ski-touring or simply hop on a helicopter. Riksgränsen itself is a smattering of traditional red-painted timber buildings on the shores of Lake Torneträsk. The world's freeride superstars cosy up in caravans by

UNDER THE WEATHER
Meteorologen Ski Lodge, Riksgränsen, Sweden



SECRET SKIING
Above: guided skiing in the Tian Shan mountains, Kyrgyzstan. Right: Perisher, Australia



the lake for the annual Big Mountain Ski Championships, held here each May, but we prefer Meteorologen Ski Lodge, a renovated turn-of-the-century customs house with 14 Scandi-chic bedrooms, a *hygge* bar and excellent restaurant. skisafari.com

 **PERISHER, AUSTRALIA**

You can ski through Aspen glades in America and Japan and through pine woods in Canada and the Alps, but there's only one place where you can ski through gum forests: Australia. The gnarled shapes and distinctive eucalyptus scent of the snow gums is a defining aspect of skiing in the Snowy Mountains in New South Wales, home to Perisher, the largest resort in the Southern Hemisphere. Already reaping the benefits of being bought by Vail Resorts last season, with updated lifts and restaurants, Perisher's scenic setting within the Kosciuszko National Park remains a happy constant. Neither is that inimitably relaxed Aussie vibe likely to change, so you can still cook your own steaks on the sunny terrace of Jax Tavern and enjoy rowdy après-ski at Guthega Alpine Inn, just a snowball's throw from the Perisher Valley Hotel. perisher.com.au

 **KYRGYZ REPUBLIC**

Most people have never heard of the Kyrgyz Republic, let alone skied there. It's a truly wild place on the Silk Road, inhabited by polar bears, eagles, horses and ancient tribes who carve out a living amidst the barren landscape. And yet, when he first visited the young

nation in 1999, Colorado mountain guide Ryan Koupal instantly recognized its potential as a ski destination. Working with local villagers, Koupal established 40 Tribes, a unique mountain-guiding operation that accommodates guests in the Jalpak Tash yurt camp, perched at 2,600m in the Tian Shan Mountains. The camp comprises three yurts—a kitchen/diner and separate yurts for clients and guides. After days spent bashing thigh-deep powder in pristine mountains, evenings slip past in the dining yurt, sipping a local Arpa beer as you watch traditional Kyrgyz dishes being prepared in a large *kazan* dish over the wood-burning stove. 40tribesbackcountry.com

 **SIERRA NEVADA, SPAIN**

Sierra Nevada is Europe's southernmost resort, even further south than Athens: as you criss-cross the flanks of the Penibético mountains, you'll glimpse the Med in the distance. Ski empty slopes in the morning before enjoying a lunch of paella and Caviar de Riofrío on the sun-trap terrace of El Lodge, the resort's sole ski-in/ski-out hotel. The debonair property comprises eight rooms and 12 suites as well as two restaurants, a bar and spa. It's a 30-minute drive through olive groves and past ramshackle *fincas* to Granada; another half hour will bring you to Costa Tropical's white-sand beaches for an après-ski swim. slh.com/ellodge



RYAN KOU PAL (KYRGYZSTAN); PERISHER.COM.AU (PERISHER); MATTIAS JOHANSSON (METEOROLEN)

JOE MCKENDRY (ILLUSTRATIONS); 40 TRIBES/ISTOCK.COM/POP_JOP (FLAGS);