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EDITOR'S LETTER

**Ready to escape the grind
for some time outdoors?**

**Looking forward to the
Winter Olympics?**

**Trying to figure out where
to snowboard?**

We totally understand!

You are holding the first edition of our new "Active Europe" magazine, written especially for people like you: folks who want to get outside and go on an adventure while stationed in Europe.

With the 2026 Winter Olympics coming to Italy in just two months, we are ready for a deep dive into the snow. Whether you like to ski and snowboard, or are more the sledding and ice-skating type, there are plenty of places for you to go for a sporty, snowy escape.

Ready to take your adventure up a notch? Take advantage of your time living near the Alps for world-class active experiences. Hone your skills with some ice climbing or head off-piste for a ski mountaineering tour.

So, what are you waiting for? See Europe in its most natural state. **Stay active; we know you have energy to burn!**

Kat Nickola

Publishing and Media Design, Lead Editor
Stars and Stripes Europe





© IOC



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SKIING

THE SELLARONDA

By Kat Nickola

V O L V O



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IMAGINE not needing to remove your skis for an entire day of skiing and circling a small, dramatic mountain range in the process. This is the Sellaronda: A famous 40 km circuit around the Sella Massif, an iconic mountain range that resembles a huge plateau. Of course, you will want to remove your skis, because you will pass five villages and numerous slopeside restaurants and huts along the way.



© HARALD WISTHALER/DOLOMITI SUPERSKI



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continued from page 6

DOLOMITI SUPERSKI

Located in northeastern Italy, the Dolomites are part of the Italian Alps with distinctive jagged peaks, cute alpine villages and skiing galore. In the heart of this area, the Dolomiti Superski region is one of the largest interconnected ski resorts in the world. It is actually a conglomeration of 12 distinctive resorts, with a single pass usable at them all.

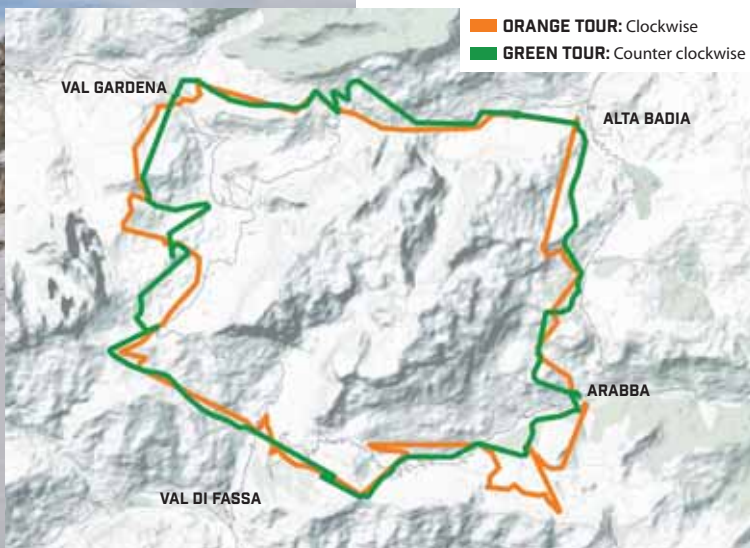
The Sellaronda offers a tour through four Dolomiti ski resorts, which can each be used as a starting location (see the Recon box).

WHICH DIRECTION?

The Sellaronda circuit has a medium level of difficulty, with both blue and red slopes. But there are two ways to run the circuit, with nuanced differences.

The Green Route takes you counterclockwise around the Sellaronda. It is made up of slightly easier slopes with more consistent snow and weather conditions. Using the Green Route is recommended on your first loop around the circuit, or if the weather and snow are bad. One downside is that there are more lifts. For fast, very experienced skiers, this route can be done nonstop in a few hours.

The Orange Route follows a clockwise path around the Sellaronda. There are some steep, varied red runs this direction, making it a more advanced path for skiers who enjoy a bit of challenge. However, many of the slopes are the first ones closed in bad weather, or they face the sun, which causes early snow melt and chunky, icy slopes. On the plus side, there are fewer lifts and more runs, meaning more time heading downhill.



APRÈS SKI

Once you've looped the Sellaronda, it is time to celebrate.

Dressed, showered and ready for a night on the town? Selva in Val Gardena offers the liveliest bars and clubs in the area, with DJs or live music late into the night at Bar Saltos, La Stua or the Luislkeller, all within a block of each other.

A true foodie will want to make reservations at one of the many gourmet restaurants in the Alta Badia area. Try homemade local cuisine at Maso Runch Hof, an 18th-century farmhouse. Or splurge on a hearty gourmet mountain dinner at the Rifugio Col Alt, with evening access by snowcat only. For traditional alpine evenings, see if your hotel offers half-board options. When booked ahead, this includes breakfast and dinner at the hotel dining room. It can be a great deal, and gives off that rustic, cozy vibe.

To ease aching bones (or get your kids to burn the last of their energy), check out the Aquapark Vidor in the Val di Fassa. This indoor waterpark has slides, pools and hydromassage jets for soothing muscles. There is also a wellness area with saunas, hot tubs and treatments. See page 48 for information about European sauna culture.

RECON

TRAIL STATS

- 40 km circuit
- 26 km of slopes
- 16-17 lifts
- 5 villages
- 4 mountain passes

2025/2026 DOLOMITI SUPERSKI LIFT TICKETS

Adult passes

1 Day €86 (peak) / €77 (shoulder)

3 Day €248 (peak) / €223 (shoulder)

Junior (ages 7-18) passes are 30% less

Kids (under 6) passes are 50% less, or free with an adult pass

LODGING

The highest concentration of hotels in the area is located west of the Sellaronda, in the Val Gardena (Gardena Valley) between the village of Ortisei and Selva-Wolkenstein. There are more upscale or rural options up the Val Badia (Badia Valley) north of Corvara village. South of the Sellaronda, the Val di Fassa (Fassa Valley) is another great choice with plenty of hotels and chalets.

STARTING LOCATIONS

- **Val Gardena Ski Resort.** The villages of Selva-Wolkenstein and Plan De Gralba offer lifts onto the Sellaronda, while S. Cristina is only a few slopes away.
- **Alta Badia Ski Resort.** The villages of Colfosco and Corvara have lifts with direct access to the Sellaronda.
- **Arabba Ski Resort.** The Sellaronda goes right through the small town of Arabba.
- **Val di Fassa.** The villages of Canazei, Alba and Campitello offer connections up to the Sellaronda via a quick gondola.

TRAIL MARKERS

Green for the counterclockwise route: easier slopes, quicker. Orange for the clockwise route: challenging skiing, conditions can change.

DIFFICULTY

Medium to experienced. All slopes are blue or red, though an occasional black slope has been used as a replacement for closures on the orange route.

TIMING

Expect to take all day, 5-6 hours, with stops for breaks or an occasional extra run. Start early; head down your first slope by 10 a.m.

Lifts open: 8:30 – 9 a.m.

Lifts close: 4 – 5 p.m. ■

Basemap Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, Intermap, INCREMENT P, GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoBase, IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance Survey, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), © OpenStreetMap contributors, GIS User Community

BACK TO THE BASICS A SKIING STORY

By Katie Wells

“Look at this perfect powder.”

My dad’s ski instructor voice echoed in my head.

I snapped on my skis, tightened my helmet strap and wrapped my poles around my wrists, envisioning the last time I skied—a perfect-powder day with my dad going down the slopes at Mammoth Mountain, California. I remember bravely daring a black diamond trail and conquering a couple of drops. It’s probable that my dad just said we were on a black diamond trail to give me confidence. Gazing up at the Dolomites in Italy, I knew I was standing by a different beast.

Around me, snow was glistening fresh from the night before, the sky clear, and only a handful of people were out on the slopes—good conditions for someone who hadn’t skied in about a

decade. My friend, whom I was traveling with, glided past and gave the thumbs up. I followed her down a gentle hill to our first lift. Easy, I thought, like riding a bike. I wobbled slightly and bent my knees, trying to release the tension.

My poles suddenly felt awkward, not like an extension to my body as they once were. I took a deep breath as I mimicked my friend’s graceful swoop and slow down into the lift line. And then I was on the ground. Helmet crooked, one ski pole in the ground and the other a few feet behind me. I quickly pulled myself up as a nice couple handed me my lost pole. I skied down to my friend and laughed it off, “Okay so maybe the skills from when I was a kid are a little bit rusty, but I’ve got this. I got the first fall out of the way.”



Luckily, she is just a seasoned amateur, so we wouldn't be going on any black diamond trails that day. At Cortina d'Ampezzo Ski Resort, the blue runs are equivalent to green beginner trails in North America according to the European ski grading system. I'm not so sure.

My knees buckled and I fell back into the lift seat. We yanked the guard rail down, and I let my lightheadedness trick me into thinking our first run would be easy.

Despite the uniform color coding, every trail was different. For a minute, I gained confidence on one blue trail. It felt pretty easy and fun. I kept up with my friend and we moved on to another one thinking it would be similar, but to me, it was much more intimidating, despite plenty of children whizzing past no problem. My friend stopped after every hill patiently while my courage faded and my descents got wobblier.

It started getting crowded. I could mostly control where I was going; although, plenty of times the French fry and pizza method failed me, and soon it would either be bail or ram into someone. I started psyching myself out...

What if I hit the people in front of me? What if I stop or swoosh at the wrong moment and get in the way of the skiers behind me?

As the day went on, and after some gnarly falls, I turned to controlled breathing and humming little tunes. At one point, despite the enormous amount of pressure I was putting on my ski to stay in place prior to a vertical drop, a gaggle of middle-school aged kids surrounded me. As I tried to turn around, one of my skis got stuck under one pre-teen boy's ski, and soon, the other kids cozied closer, making it impossible to untangle myself. Plus, the drop was looming. One slip and it would not be a fun ride down.

The boy spoke to me in Italian, or maybe French, about some sort of cookies. With one hand he pulled a couple out of his pocket to munch on. The other, he rested casually atop my pole. He seemed totally unbothered that I was not part of their group. Maybe he sensed that I should have been, as a beginner who was starting to realize that time away from practicing a skill can make you a newbie once again.

A few painstaking minutes later, the kid stuck out his 12ish-year-old bicep and released my pole so I could push off him and be on my way. Sweet kid (I think he even waved me off), incredibly awkward situation for a 30-year-old adult as I skied down to my friend who had a front-row seat to the debacle and was stifling laughter.

continued on page 12

“

What if I hit the people in front of me? What if I stop or swoosh at the wrong moment and get in the way of the skiers behind me?

”



We decided to take a break for lunch and rode the Olimpia Lift high up into the Dolomite peaks. No, I did not brave skiing from there, especially since the pros were free-falling and disappearing into a plume of powder, but I did enjoy sipping hot green tea and devouring a fluffy tiramisu. We watched ever-changing clouds roll over mountains as an Alpine Chough, a subspecies of crow, squawked loudly at us to share our food. When the sun peaked out, people shed their shell coats and enjoyed the warmth. There were even lounge chairs up there—very European indeed.

On our way down, I decided to bow out and go explore town while my friend moved on to a more complex network of trails.

Despite lasting just half the day and the likelihood that there is still a Katie-shaped hole in the mountains up there, I'm proud of myself for getting back up and trying.

While I can give my false-confident-self props (and perhaps the day trained me for a different story involving skiing the rental car down a dark icy construction road), I fell a lot, and in hindsight, I may have been a danger to those around me.

I highly recommend taking a ski lesson or two, or three, before getting back out there. Check out the ski schools. Places in Cortina d'Ampezzo like Scuola Sci Azzurra and Scuola Ski Cortina offer beginner short courses for teens and mini courses for adults. You can also book private lessons. Many ski resorts have beginner's areas with practice lifts and well-groomed nursery, or "bunny" slopes at the base of the mountain where you can get comfortable with the skills you've learned.



So, in sum, here are a few tips from a humbled, reinstated skiing newbie who thought her mediocre skills would come back like riding a bike.

Before you get back out there:

- **Take a lesson or a few.** Many resorts offer this.
- **Have fun** and be brave.
- **Your poles are not breaks** (you will rotate your shoulder in funny new angles). In Europe, it is common for beginners to not use poles.
- **Don't worry about the people behind you.** It's their job to make their own route.
- **Take it slow.** If you find one trail you like, get good at it before leveling up.
- **Wear your helmet.** I'm 100% sure mine saved my life.
- **If you must fall, fall.** You may get bruises for souvenirs, but it's better than completely losing control. And it's kind of fun! Your adrenaline will be pumping.
- **Keep your pass** in a zipped pocket.
- **Sauna.** Your muscles will thank you after an intense day.
- **Bring sunglasses or your own goggles,** not all rental companies provide them.
- **Take a break** at one of the food and beverage huts. Enjoy your surroundings—the mountains, fresh air and other skiers from all over the world.
- **Rest assured;** everyone starts somewhere. There will be mishaps and that is part of the fun. ■



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Sylvia Holzapfel



YOUR GUIDE TO THE 2026 WINTER OLYMPICS





By Kat Nickola

The 2026 Winter Olympics and Paralympics are in northern Italy, and you can join in the excitement! Whether you get tickets to wheelchair curling, watch the snowboarding halfpipe on TV or head out to see the torch relay, it is sure to be impressive.

It's all ice and snow for the Winter Games. Here is a rundown of the different sports and what events they entail. Team USA will participate in all events, and you can follow their progress at www.teamusa.com.

DOWNHILL SNOW SPORTS

ALPINE SKIING

Speed and technique are key for the six alpine skiing events. **Downhill** involves a long high-speed course with jumps and gates for keeping on track. A **Slalom** competition has two rounds on two courses with technical aspects and tight gates. The **Giant Slalom** is a longer, faster version of the slalom with wider gates and two courses. The single-run **Super-G**, or super giant slalom, has aspects of both a downhill and slalom course. A **Combined** event involves a single calculated score between two athletes—one skiing a downhill course and the other skiing a slalom.

SNOWBOARD

Snowboarding has both timed downhill and stunt-based freestyle events. In the **Parallel Giant Slalom**, two snowboarders race for time down a side-by-side course. **Slopestyle** courses have rails and jumps with points accumulated by trick quality. In a **Snowboard Cross** event, athletes are timed down a course with jumps, moguls and curves. Athletes are judged on the style and difficulty of their stunts in the **Halfpipe** and while airborne after sliding down a massive ramp for **Big Air** events.

SKI JUMPING

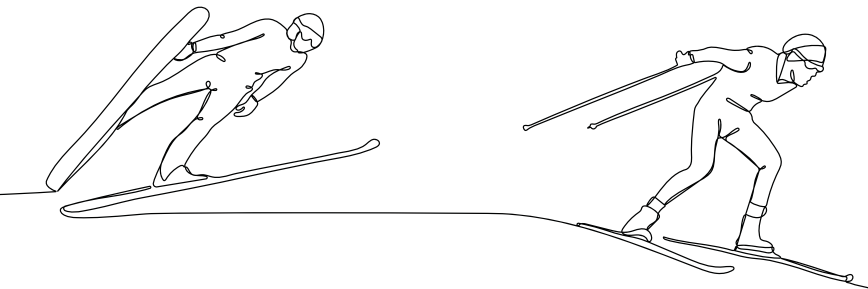
Both the distance they fly and an athlete's style while airborne contribute to a final score in ski jumping. Jumps occur on special-built ramps with sloped landing zones. There are both **Large Hill** and **Normal Hill** events, plus **Team** events with shared scores.

FREESTYLE SKIING

There are lots of different events in freestyle skiing that involve multiple skiers on slopes with obstacles for tricks. A **Slopestyle** course has rails and jumps for stunts, the **Moguls** courses give athletes a slope full of bumps to accrue points on both tricks and speed, and a **Ski Cross** course is judged on speed down a course with jumps and curves. There are also airborne events; for **Aerials** there are ramps skiers flying off to do tricks, the **Halfpipe** is a large U-shaped slope, and then there is the massive ramp for the **Big Air** event giving skiers lots of airtime for stunts before landing.

SKI MOUNTAINEERING (SKI MO)

This is the first year that SkiMo will be included as an Olympic sport: It involves skiing uphill with skins to help grip the snow, stashing skis in a backpack for hiking sections and then skiing off-piste-style sections of a downhill course. There are **Sprint** events for individual athletes on a short course and **Mixed Relay** events for two athletes, one woman and one man, who alternate tackling a longer course.



NORDIC SNOW SPORTS

CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING

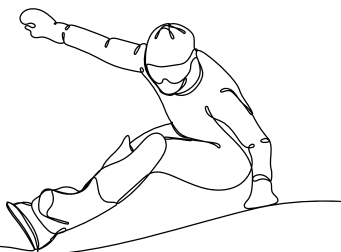
Using long, slim and lightweight skis, athletes traverse snow-covered terrain to race for time. The 2026 Winter Olympics is the first time cross-country ski courses will be the same for both men and women. There are two techniques in cross-country skiing: When athletes use their skis in a forward, parallel motion it is called **Classic**, and when they use a faster skating method, it is called **Freestyle**. Individual **Sprint** (1.5km) and **10km** events allow freestyle, while the long **50km** course requires classic technique. Two events blend both styles, the individual 20km **Skiathlon** and the four-person team **Relays**.

BIATHLON

In a biathlon, athletes cross-country ski between ranges where they use a rifle to shoot targets. **Individual** events use staggered start times for long courses with four shooting ranges; **Sprint** events are half that. In a **Relay** or **Mixed Relay** event, a four-person team tackles a long course with individual cross-country ski sections and two shooting ranges per teammate. Lastly, a **Mass Start** event is similar to individual races, but with up to 30 athletes starting together.

NORDIC COMBINED

With both individual and team competitions, the Nordic Combined is a unique sport. Competitors start at the top of either the **Large Hill** or the **Normal Hill** to begin the event with a ski jump. Scores for the ski jump establish a starting order and time penalties for the next stage: a 10-kilometer cross-country ski race with the winner crossing the finish line first.



SLIDING SPORTS

BOBSLEIGH

The bobsleigh is an enclosed and steerable sled with brakes. The team pushes it in a running start, then jump on as it enters the downhill part of the icy track. Events include the **Monobob** with one female athlete, **2-man** or **2-woman** races with a single pilot and a single brakeman, or a **4-man** race with four athletes.

SKELETON

The skeleton uses an open sled for a single athlete using only body movement for steering and braking. They sprint along the starting area of the ice track to build up speed before hopping on the sled head-first and on their belly.

LUGE

The luge also uses an open sled with a single athlete using their body to steer. The race begins with the athlete sitting atop the sled using their hands to launch. Once gliding, they lay flat on their back with feet first down the course.

ICE ARENA SPORTS

CURLING

This is a team sport where the goal is to glide eight granite stones across the ice to a target. Because the stone will naturally curl one direction (giving the sport its name), teammates use brushes to sweep the ice, affecting the stone's speed and curl.

FIGURE SKATING

With scores based on both performance and technical ability, figure skating athletes exhibit their skills with routines set to music. There are both men's and women's **Single Skating** events and **Pair** events, plus couples' **Ice Dancing**. There is also a **Team Competition** in which each team presents short programs and free skating performances to be scored together.

ICE HOCKEY

This team sport allows a maximum of six team members on the ice at one time with a goal of using their stick to hit the puck into the opponent's net. There is a **Women's** event and a **Men's** event.

SPEED SKATING

Using special ice skates and aerodynamic gear, athletes race in pairs for these speed-skating events. Races on the Short Track (111.12 meters) involve multiple elimination rounds, while races on the Speed Skating Track (400 meters) are timed. On both tracks, race lengths are **500**, **1000**, and **1500** meters, plus longer **Women's**, **Men's** and **Mixed Team Relay** events. Two teams of three race in the single-elimination-style **Team Pursuit** events, and 24 racers begin the Mass Start event with 16 laps and three sprints.

PARALYMPIC SPORTS

PARA ALPINE SKIING

Athletes will participate in downhill skiing, Super-G, Giant Slalom, Slalom and Super Combined events in three categories: standing, sitting and vision impaired.

PARA BIATHLON

For this cross-country ski race, athletes compete on traditional skis or sit-skis and stop at shooting ranges to hit two targets, which may be size modified. If needed, athletes may have a coach pull the trigger once they have aimed and positioned their rifle.

PARA CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING

Athletes race in relays and 5-, 10- and 20-kilometer cross-country skiing events in standing, sitting or vision impaired categories.

PARA ICE HOCKEY

Using a special seated sledge and two sticks, athletes play ice hockey games consisting of three 15-minute periods.

PARA SNOWBOARD

There are Banked Slalom and Snowboard Cross events and athletes may participate using lower-limb prosthetics, modified equipment or a standing snowboard.

WHEELCHAIR CURLING

All team members use wheelchairs for curling and the athlete throwing the stone may have a fellow teammate stabilize their wheelchair.

FOLLOW THE TORCH

The slender, minimalist cylindrical torch for the 2026 Winter Olympics was named “Essential” and designed with an aim for achieving a larger flame, allowing the fire to be the focus. The Olympic torch has a blue-green finish while the Paralympic torch is a bronzy-brown. Both torches are on display at the Triennale Milano art museum in Milan until the end of the games.

OLYMPIC TORCH RELAY

The Olympic torch relay is traversing all of Italy and coming close to many U.S. military installations. It officially begins in Greece on Nov. 26, 2025 where the flame is lit at the Temple of Hera in Olympia, Greece using an ancient Greek parabolic (curved) mirror. After a relay in Greece, the torch is lands in Rome, Italy on Dec. 4, 2025 and traverses all 110 of the country’s provinces over the following two months.

- Near Camp Darby in Livorno on Dec. 12, 2025
- Near NAS Sigonella in Catania on Dec. 18, 2025
- In Naples on Dec. 23, 2025
- In Vicenza on Jan. 20, 2026
- Near Aviano AB in Udine on Jan. 24 and Belluno on Jan. 25, 2026
- Opening ceremony and torch lighting in Milan on Feb. 6, 2026

PARALYMPIC TORCH RELAY

The Paralympic torch will travel near USAG Italy in Vicenza and Aviano AB during its tour. The route begins on Feb. 24, 2026 at the Stoke Mandeville Hospital in Aylesbury, England, where the therapeutic use of sports competitions led to the paralympic games in 1960. The paralympic torch will be lit at the hospital and then sent in five separate ‘sparks’ to Flame Festivals in northern Italy before reuniting for a three-day relay.

- Flame Festivals in Milan, Turin, Bolzano, Trento and Trieste from 24 Feb – March 2, 2026.
- Cortina d’Ampezzo flame unification on March 3, 2026
- Relay in Venice on March 4, 2026
- Relay in Padova on March 5, 2026
- Opening ceremony and torch lighting in Verona on Mar 6, 2026

For a map of the entire torch relay, visit milanocortina2026.olympics.com/en/the-greatest-journey.



RECON

WINTER OLYMPICS: Feb. 6–22, 2026

WINTER PARALYMPICS: March 6–15, 2026

LOCATIONS

- Milan (Olympic opening ceremony, ice hockey, skating)
- Livigno (freestyle skiing, snowboard)
- Stelvio (men’s skiing, skimo)
- Cortina d’Ampezzo (women’s skiing, para skiing, para snowboard, curling, sliding, Paralympic closing ceremony)
- Anterselva (biathlon)
- Predazzo (ski jumping)
- Tesero (cross-country skiing, para biathlon)
- Verona (Olympic closing ceremony, Paralympic opening ceremony)

TICKETS

tickets.milanocortina2026.org

HOW TO WATCH FROM HOME

Keep in mind that commentary will be in the local language.

Germany

- ARD | www.ardmediathek.de
- ZDF | www.zdf.de

Italy

- RAI | www.raiplay.it

England

- BBC | www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer

Poland

- TVP | www.tvp.pl

US coverage via VPN in Europe

- NBC (requires a local affiliate account) www.nbcolympics.com
- Peacock (paid subscription) www.peacocktv.com ■

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SKI

MOUNTAINEERING

the Haute Route

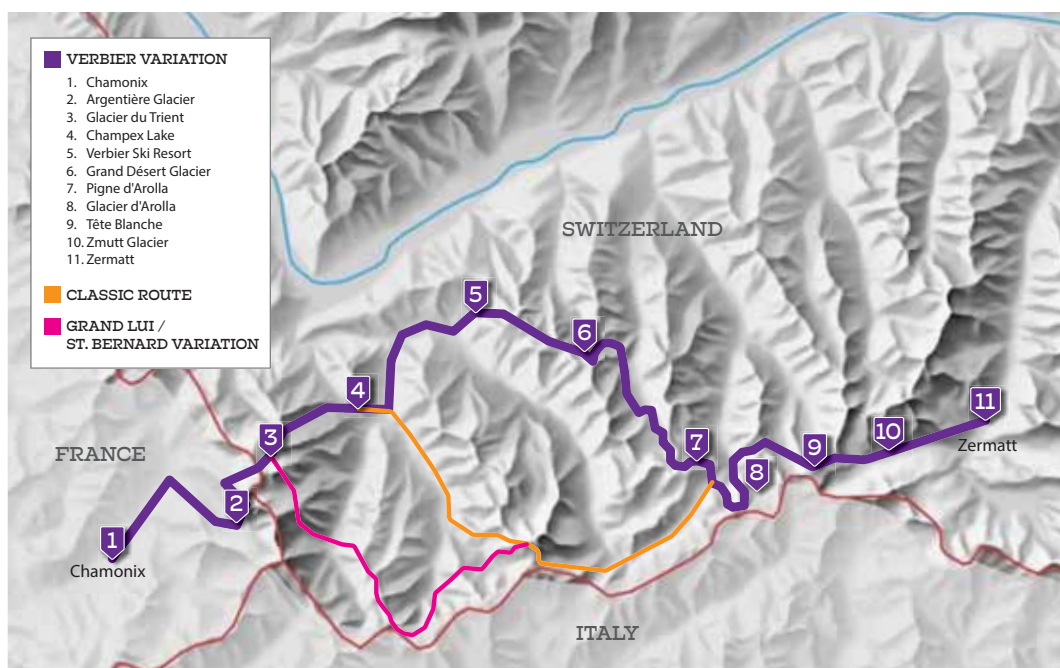
By Kat Nickola

IF YOUR IDEA OF PERFECTION

is avoiding the crowds on ski lifts and climbing your way up to fresh powder and miles of empty backcountry, then ski mountaineering might be your next adventure. Using specially designed skis and bindings to allow for both slogging uphill and bombing downhill, ski mountaineers also need to be adept at using ice axes and crampons for scaling steep slopes.

The **Haute Route** between Mont Blanc in Chamonix, France and the Matterhorn in Zermatt, Switzerland has become the bucket list alpine ski mountaineering trek for die-hard winter adventurers.

Also known as the **High-Route**, this seven-day trek covers roughly 200 kilometers up and down some of the most incredible scenery the Alps has on offer. There are 6,000 meters of ascent and descent as the trail traverses mountain passes and iconic 3,000 meter peaks. Along the way, you get the chance to cross 11 glaciers.



In the evenings, high mountain refuges offer cozy accommodations with gob-smacking views over the mountains and hot food perfect for restoring calories and resting legs.

Only tackle this route with a reputable, safe guiding service that is certified by the International Federation of Mountain Guides Association (IFMGA in English, UIAGM in French, IVBV in German). Guides will ensure that everyone has been trained properly to use climbing gear and they guarantee that safety and rescue skills are practiced. In addition, guides handle route planning, booking mountain huts, meal planning and other logistics.

To tackle the Haute Route with a guide, you don't need to have mountaineering skills, but you do need to be an excellent skier. Black diamond and previous backcountry ski experience is a must, and you should be in top condition for strenuous skiing on skins uphill at high elevation for up to seven hours a day.

Typically, guiding services have set planned dates in March or April that you can book via their website. Costs range from 1,200 to 2,000 euros, with variations primarily dependent on whether room and board costs are included. A few other things to note when choosing a service are the guide to participant ratio, any gear loans, lift ticket fees, lunch or snack exclusions, and whether there is transportation or accommodation before and after the tour.

RECON

HAUTE ROUTE VARIATIONS

- **The Classic route** uses a vehicle shuttle to head south after the Champex Lake to continue from Bourg-St-Pierre.
- **The Verbier variation** is similar to the classic route, but uses a vehicle shuttle to the north, avoiding a very technical section, through Verbier village. This is the most popular route.
- **The Grand Lui, or Saint Bernard, variation** does not have any vehicle connections. Instead, the route stays south after passing into Switzerland, going through more remote territory.

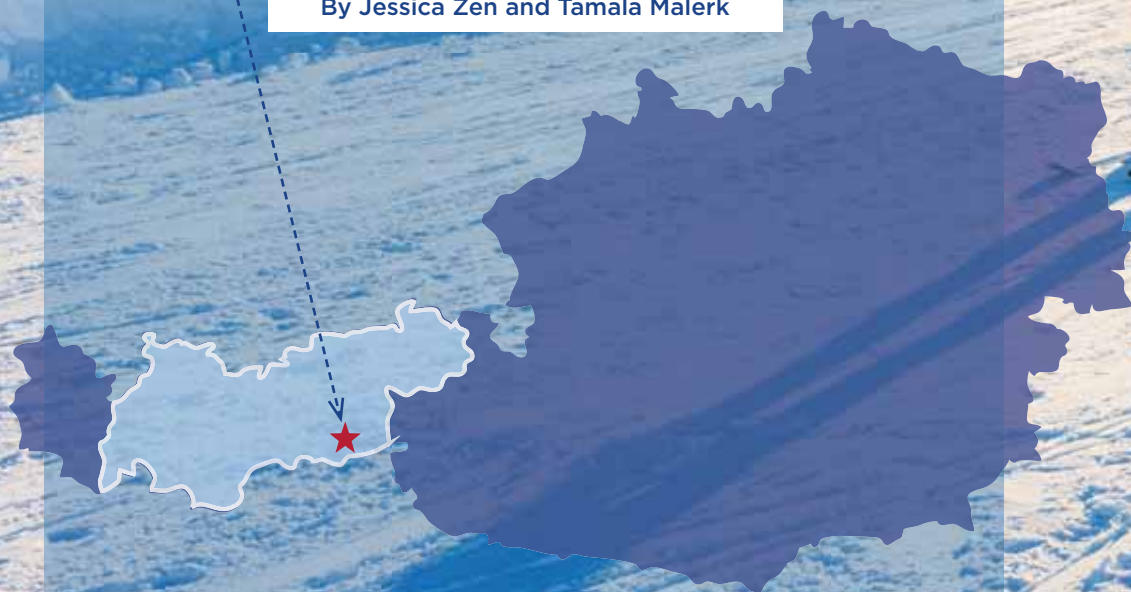
These companies offer trips with English-speaking IFMGA/UIAGM/IVBV-certified guides.

- Alpine Guides, based in the U.K. | www.alpine-guides.com
- Alpine World, based in Germany | www.alpinewelten.com
- ChameX, based in France | www.chamex.com
- Chamonix Guides, based in France | www.chamonix-guides.com/en
- Kleinwalsertal Mountain School, based in Austria | www.bergschule.at
- Mountain Tracks, based in the U.K. | www.mountaintracks.co.uk ■

It's Always Snowy in

HIN TER TUX

By Jessica Zen and Tamala Malerk



For the true snow sport lovers, there is a place that promises to be the “most snow-sure ski area of Austria” and to have a ski season that opens much earlier and closes much later than many others. At **Hinterlux Glacier**, you can reach an elevation of over 10,000 feet and ski down 37 miles of runs. Or, visit **Betterpark Hintertux** and **Funslope Hintertux** on the glacier. No matter where you spend your day, you’re sure to find enough snow to be thoroughly entertained.

Betterpark Hintertux is a paradise for snowboarders and freeskiers. Open from mid-September to early June, this is the highest freestyle spot in Austria. Located at the foot of Olperer Mountain, this area is a strong contender to take home the “best snow park in the Alps” title. The snow park has a little bit of everything, with five lines, including pro, large, medium, small and jib as well as a half-pipe, jumps, rails and boxes. This is an adrenaline junkies’ dream.

If you’re looking for a more relaxed skiing experience, visit **Funslope Hintertux** at Sommerbergalm. This family-friendly ski area is an adventure course where participants can zoom over snow waves, go around banked turns and ski through a tunnel. Funslope even has its own mascot, Slopy. There are two different adventure courses. If you go left, you must conquer a snow canyon. Go right, and...well, try both courses and find out.

If you’ve heard enough and are convinced you need to visit, you’ll need a few things. First of all, skis are quite important for a skiing trip. You can find rental stations in the villages of Hintertux, Tux, Finkenberg and at the ski resort. Ticket and pass prices vary by age and season, and you can price out the best time for your visit at hintertuxergletscher.at.

If you just can’t spend enough time on the glacier, go to the **Nature Ice Palace**. This unique natural jewel is open year-round and is fun for the whole

family (ages 6 and up). Deep below the ski slopes, you’ll experience ice stalactites, sparkling ice crystals, frozen waterfalls and a glacier lake at a constant temperature of 32° F. Tours take place hourly from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. daily. Ticket prices are €39 for adults and €15 for children 6–14 accompanied by an adult, and do not include lift tickets.

A hotel to rest your weary head and get some hot food after a strenuous day of skiing is a must.

Consider staying at Hotel Höhlenstein in Tux, where you’ll find spacious rooms, delicious food, a sauna and beautiful views of the Hintertux Glacier. It’s just over two miles away from the glacier and is right next to a bus stop that will take you directly to your skiing destination. It’s even pet-friendly, so your fur baby can be a part of the fun.

If you prefer to be closer to the glacier, visit Hotel Neuhintertux, which is a mere 164 feet away from the ski slopes. This four-star hotel has a wellness oasis that includes an indoor pool, outdoor hot tub, saunas, infra-

red cabin, ski and bike rental, fresh air terrace, a sky pool and spa treatments. After a day of skiing your heart out, it might be nice to ski right back to your hotel and be on a massage table within minutes.

If you choose to return in the summer, you will not be disappointed. While you may not be able to ski, you will still find a comfortable climate for other outdoor activities. There are hiking trails ranging from easy to expert, family-friendly safaris with climbing spots and picnic areas, and children can partake in a snowball fight in summer at the adventure playground. No matter what you do, or where you stay in the snowy Hintertux area, make sure to bring your jacket and prepare for fun. ■



**Live Lift
Status at
Hintertux
Glacier:**



Ice Climbing in Europe

By Kat Nickola

Your goal is simple enough: climb up a cliff made of ice.



For all those rock climbers or winter hikers out there ready to stretch their skills, Europe is a great place to start ice climbing.

Your goal is simple enough: climb up a cliff made of ice. But, in this winter sport the conditions can vary year-to-year and even day-to-day. That is because the ice that you are climbing is formed seasonally.

Often, an ice fall will develop in places where water slowly trickles from cracks in a cliff. Over the season, it will change as more water emerges from the ground to trickle down, solidify and build the ice flow. Sometimes entire waterfalls freeze and can be climbed, while in other places you can climb the edges of glaciers. In many popular ice climbing locations, the ice is farmed by purposefully spraying water overnight when it can freeze.

The sport of ice climbing is comparable to rock climbing, in that you will use a harness, rope and helmet for safety. Beyond that, the gear is a bit different. You need two small, specially designed ice tools—one for each hand—to grip the ice and stabilize yourself while climbing upward. It is also necessary to wear rigid mountaineering boots with C3 crampons. These are very stiff and have multi-directional spikes to help grasp the ice, including forward-facing spikes at the toe to help you get a foothold for moving up. Lastly, you will need appropriate cold-weather clothes. Dress in layers and use an outer shell jacket and side-zip pants that can handle some abrasion against the ice.



Where to go

Newbies looking for lessons can find outfitters and guides at the major ice climbing hubs across Europe. These hotspots are also perfect for seasoned ice climbers. ■

Dolomites, Italy

It seems like the Dolomites are a hotspot for every mountain sport, and ice climbing is no exception. The tall spires and high alpine waterfalls make perfect ice falls ready for climbers once the freezing season begins. The **Val Gardena** area is surrounded by ice climbing options. There are high, exposed routes on rock faces, but also deep, intimate spaces in hidden valleys.

Ötztal, Austria

There are so many places to ice climb in Austria that it makes for an easy day trip to add to any winter skiing holiday. Almost every ski resort or hotel can connect you with a tour or mountain guide ready to take you on the ice. For the most options and an ice-focused trip, head to the Ötztal (Ötz Valley) west of Innsbruck. Between the villages of **Längenfeld** and **Sölden** there are dozens of frozen waterfalls just waiting to be climbed.

Rjukan, Norway

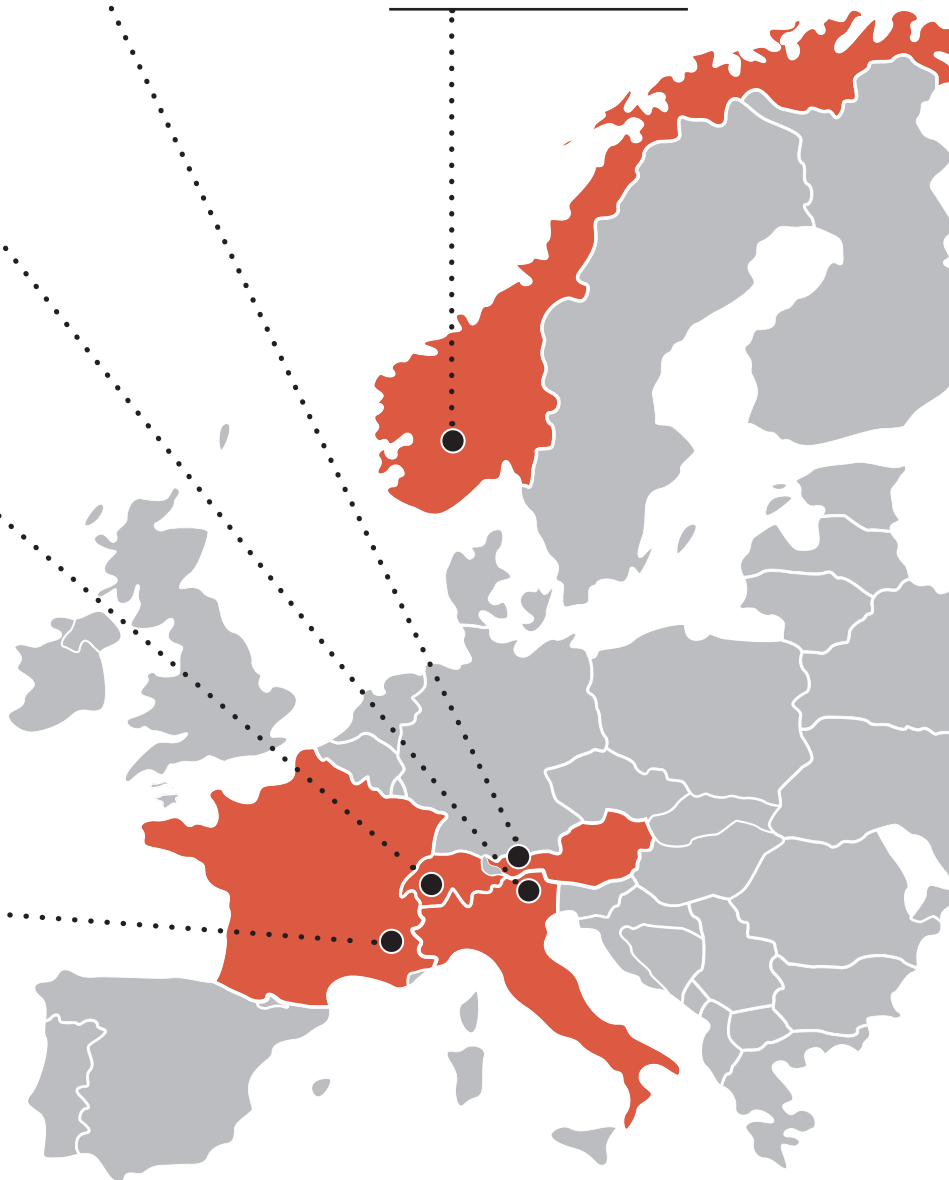
For guaranteed ice and frozen temperatures, Norway is your destination. **Rjukan** is one of the most popular ice climbing destinations in the world. This small village is nestled at the bottom of a steep valley, meaning it doesn't get direct sunlight for months in the winter. Because of this, the ice climbing season lasts significantly longer, from November to March, than at ice walls in the Alps. There are over 190 frozen waterfalls that line the sides of the valley, meaning you can get to climbs quickly, spend a cold (short) day on the ice and be back in town in no time.

Saas-Fee, Switzerland

There is a reason the Ice Climbing World Cup is held in this spot every year. In the town's parking garage is a huge ice climbing park called the **Saas-Fee Ice Climbing Dome** where ice is farmed to manufacture stable, massive ice walls for tournaments. It is open to the public, for a fee, outside of competitions. More impressive, however, is the nearby unique experience of climbing along the edge of the **Feegletscher** (Fee Glacier), with guided routes for beginners and advanced climbers spanning this long icy cliff. Nearby, in the hamlet of Saas-Grund and behind the gondola, is another publicly-accessible (for a seasonal fee) climbing area called the **Chalchofen** that is lit at night.

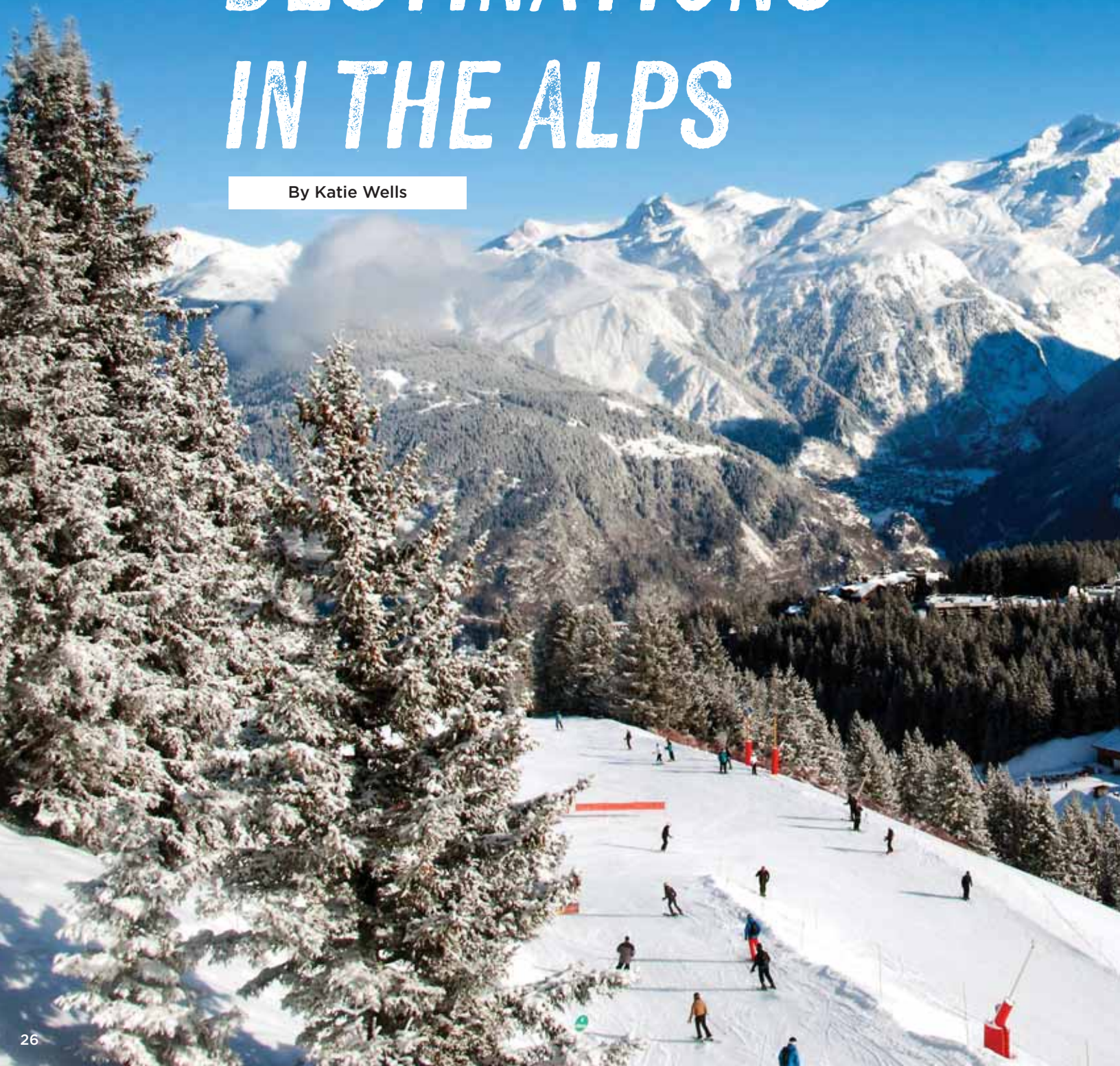
Les Ecrins, France

Europe's highest concentration of ice climbing is in the mountains of the **Parc National des Écrins**. This section of the French Alps is full of canyons and valleys where the waterflows consistently freeze every year. There is also a big annual ice festival at the end of January in the **Freissinières Valley** with exhibitions, competitions and plenty of workshops. Festivals are a great way to learn about the sport, try out some gear and take a class to help you learn ice climbing skills.



THE *Best* SKI DESTINATIONS IN THE ALPS

By Katie Wells





Whether you are a beginner on the slopes, advanced skier, or average snowboarder, or don't partake in winter sports at all, these are our picks for the best ski destinations across the Alps tailored to your interests.

MOST POSH AND EXCLUSIVE

COURCHEVEL 1850, FRANCE

Truly elite, Courchevel 1850 is known for its celebrity clientele and for being the most starred resort with 14 Michelin Stars dispersed across its dining scene. Visitors can stay in the most luxury chalets and shop at designer boutiques as well as end the day partying at exclusive night clubs. But what about the skiing? Millions of euros are invested each year to improve ski lifts and artificial snow. There is plenty of variety in slopes ranging from easier blue slopes to famous black slopes like "Jean Blanc." World class skiing and snowboarding await you.

RECON

- 600km of slopes
- 65 lifts
- **Ideal for:** Luxury travelers and beginner to advanced skiers
- **Difficulty:** Green, blue, red and black runs
- **Highlight:** Access to Three Valleys ski area, plus a small airport for private jet and helicopter transports
- **Tip:** Purchase the Three Valleys Pass to access slopes in the linked ski area and 8 included resorts

HONORABLE MENTION

MEGÈVE, FRANCE

For a more affordable, yet still glamorous, ski resort experience, Megève features discreet and understated luxury. It is also the ski area featured in "Emily in Paris."

BEST FOR SNOWBOARDERS

FLIMS LAAX FALERA, SWITZERLAND

As the host of the prestigious LAAX Open Snowboard Competition, it's no shock that this ski destination is considered the best for snowboarding. There are state of the art facilities and lift systems, consistent high altitude snow conditions and world-class snow parks. 70 percent of the slopes sit above a 2,000 meter altitude, which ensures reliable snow. Challenge your skills with over 90 obstacles—some are suitable for beginners. Flims Laax has the longest continuous halfpipe in the world. If you are a night owl, try night skiing or a guided full moon tour.

RECON

- 224km of slopes
- 5 snow parks
- 29 ski lifts
- **Ideal for:** Free riding and long descents
- **Difficulty:** Blue, red and black runs
- **Highlight:** The Black Slope of Sogn Martin—La Siala has amazing views of the Vorab glacier

HONORABLE MENTION

TIGNES AND VALD'ISÈRE, FRANCE "L'ESPACE KILLY"

High altitude terrains, off-piste opportunities for experienced boarders and dedicated snow parks.

MOST FAMILY-FRIENDLY

SERFAUS-FISS-LADIS, AUSTRIA

Perfect for the whole family, but specially designed with kids in mind, this ski area consistently wins awards for their family-centric innovation. Enjoy car-free village centers and an underground funicular for easy access to the slopes. Berta's Kinderland and Murmli's Kinderwelt are kid-specific ski villages designed for learning how to ski. For teens, and more experienced skiers, there are plenty of snow parks, freeride terrain and cross-country skiing trails. Check out the Shredpark, Toboggan runs, ice skating and plenty of other outdoor and indoor adventures.

RECON

- 214km of slopes
- 68 lifts
- **Ideal for:** Families from beginners to advanced
- **Difficulty:** Blue, red and black runs
- **Highlights:** Specialized adventure slopes, freeride routes and racecourses.

HONORABLE MENTION

LA PLAGNE, FRANCE

Gentle slopes for beginners, ease of access, variety of activities like an Olympic bobsleigh track, sledging and ice skating.

BEST FOR ADVANCED SKIERS

CHAMONIX, FRANCE

For advanced skiers, this ski destination offers steep terrain and plenty of opportunities for freeriding. There are extremely challenging areas at Mont Blanc such as Grand Montets, which is legendary for its deep and steep skiing, black runs and off-piste skiing. Vallee Blanche requires a professional guide even for advanced skiers due to the unpatrolled nature. Beyond expert-level skiing options, there are areas great for all levels of skiing, plus activities like dogsledding, snowshoeing and paragliding.

RECON

- 115km of slopes
- 65 lifts
- **Ideal for:** Experienced advanced skiers
- **Difficulty:** Blue, red and black runs
- **Highlights:** World class freeride terrain, the famous Valle Blanche, the Mer de Glace glacier.

HONORABLE MENTION

ZERMATT, SWITZERLAND

Said to be the capital of alpinism, ski high altitudes and extreme vertical descents like the Matterhorn Glacier Paradise.



PREVIOUS PAGE Courchevel 1850
ABOVE Flims Laax Falera, Switzerland is best for snowboarders, but there is plenty to uncover on skis
OPPOSITE LEFT A family at Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis, Austria
OPPOSITE RIGHT The famous cable car at Chamonix, France



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continued from page 29



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ABOVE Cortina d'Ampezzo
RIGHT Cross-country skiing
in Seefeld, Austria
OPPOSITE Falzarego Pass in
Cortina d'Ampezzo

MOST ROMANTIC GETAWAY

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, ITALY

Known as the "Queen of the Dolomites", this area is perfect for a romantic getaway. The town has charming pedestrian streets for leisurely strolls and shopping. There are plenty of high-quality restaurants and you can book a cozy chalet or luxury boutique hotel with spas. To top off the romance, couples can watch the Dolomite mountains glow pink at sunset. The skiing is top tier as well, with slopes for all levels including Olympic runs.

RECON

- 120km of slopes
- 36 lifts
- **Ideal for:** Romantic getaways and beginners to expert skiers.
- **Difficulty:** Blue, red and black runs
- **Highlight:** Italy held its first Olympic games in Cortina in 1956. And the games will return in 2026. Cortina connects to over 500 km of ski slopes.

HONORABLE MENTION

KITZBÜHEL, AUSTRIA

This ski destination has a medieval town and blends charm with glamour. Enjoy shopping and horse-drawn carriage rides with your sweetheart after a day of skiing.

BEST FOR CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING

SEEFELD, AUSTRIA

The "home of langlaufen" (cross-country skiing), this area is a well-known Olympic region with approximately 300km of cross-country trails spanning across five villages. This destination hosted Olympic events in 1964 and 1976. Snow is very reliable as many trails are equipped with snow cannons to ensure good conditions. For more of a challenge, skiers can run through a three kilometer illuminated night trail on the weekends.

RECON

- 300km of slopes
- 34 lifts
- **Ideal for:** All skill levels, but especially for cross-country skiers
- **Difficulty:** Blue, red and black runs
- **Highlight:** Huge network of cross-country trails and an illuminated night trail.

HONORABLE MENTION

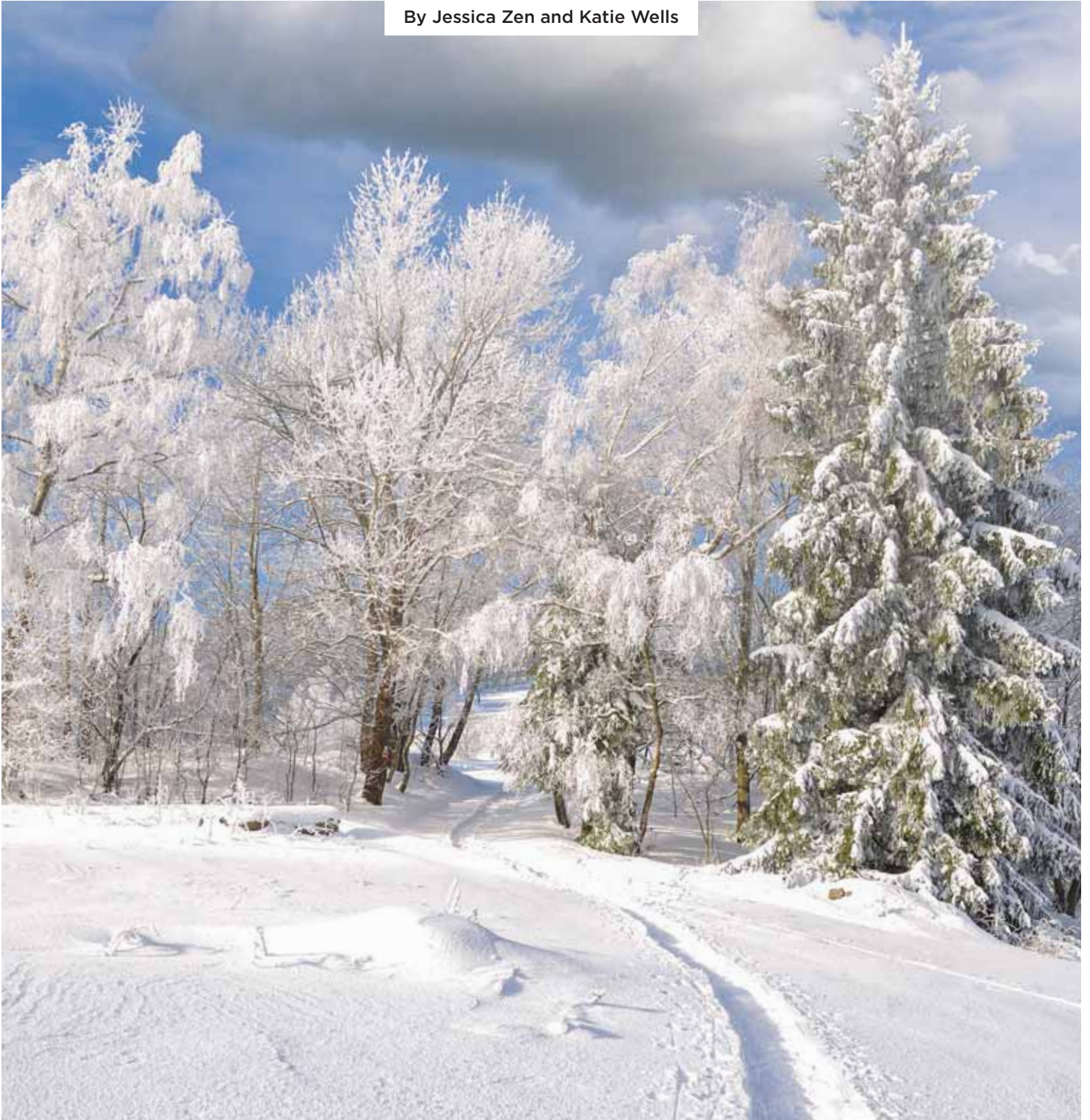
DAVOS, SWITZERLAND

A favorite training location for Nordic ski teams, this area has a long-lasting cross-country ski season. ■



GETAWAY TO *Bodenmais*

By Jessica Zen and Katie Wells



Lush green forests delicately draped in winter's finest blanket of snow invite outdoor enthusiasts of all ages to experience a wonderland in Bodenmais, Germany. This quaint town in the Bavarian Forests is nestled in the Zeller Valley and is the perfect place for a day trip or weekend adventure if you live in the Bavaria region.

ACTIVITIES

The landscape at Bodenmais beckons visitors to take magnificent snowy hikes through the trees or go racing down the local ski hill, **the Great Arber**. With a small population of 3,500 people, the town is the perfect peaceful winter escape away from the crowds that the Alps draw.

The king of the Bavarian hills, the Great Arber, stands tall at 4,776 feet, and you can find all levels of ski run difficulties here: from bunny hills to more challenging runs at the peak. This family-friendly ski location has a children's ski area equipped with conveyor belts and 14 ski and snowboard schools. This is a fabulous opportunity to teach younger skiers the basics and help build the confidence of amateur skiers. Visitors can take the gondola or two six-seater chairlifts up to different ski slopes. This area is also ideal for cross-country skiing trails and ski touring.

If skiing isn't for you but you just can't get enough of the crisp, pine-scented mountain air, utilize the 49 miles of rolling, maintained hiking trails. The glittering snow and nature's finest ice sculptures are sure to dazzle as you stroll past them. The **Oberlohwies-Riedlberg-Mais** circular route is an easy hike that takes about three hours and is 5.7 miles long. There is also an opportunity to stop for refreshments halfway. For more snow activities, you can enjoy snowshoeing or a forest toboggan run.

After you've frozen your toes off and you can't feel your cheeks anymore, head to **Silberberg Bathing and Sauna Park** to warm up. Their indoor panoramic pool overlooks the forest and offers vacationers an ideal location for rest, relaxation and refreshments. Children can splash in the fun area while adults soak in the warmth of the sauna park.



For an incredibly unique dining experience, visit **Böhmhof-Alm**, one of Germany's smallest restaurants. This tiny location only seats four people. What it lacks in size, it makes up for in food! Here you can get a traditional multi-course Bavarian meal, as well as choose from a selection of special wines, beers and schnapps. You can also have meat or cheese fondue. Make reservations for an intimate date night you won't soon forget.

THE AKTIVCARD

Before booking a place to stay, check aktivcard-bayerischer-wald.de to see if your accommodation is a participant. The AktivCARD is included for free to all guests at participating locations. It grants visitors free access to around 150 services, including ski lifts, ski rentals, swimming pools like the Silberberg Bathing and Sauna Park, zoos, museums, treetop walks, a bread baking class and so much more year-round.

WINTER EVENTS

Despite the town's small size, in the winter, there are many events that draw visitors in. The **Christkindlanschießen**, a tradition that arose in the 17th century, is rooted in legends and folklore about the awakening of nature during the winter. Loud noises created by bells or whips were once used to keep demons and sinister figures at bay. The Aberschutzen Bodenmais Club keeps the tradition alive by greeting the Christ Child with loud cannon shots while the Bodenmais tower musicians play Christmas melodies.

Should you find yourself in Bodenmais over the New Year, there is a celebration in the marketplace with an open-air dance floor, music and drinks. In January, the local glass factory usually hosts the Festival of Lights. During this time, a variety of light shows, fireworks, fire shows, laser shows, illuminations and pyro effects take place while a DJ plays party music.

GETTING THERE

The town is in the district of Regen, close to the border of Czechia. For those stationed at Vilseck and Grafenwöhr military bases, the drive time is approximately two hours. From Ansbach, it is roughly two-and-a-half.

Don't let the cold weather keep you from traveling during the winter. Bundle up and head out to explore new and unknown places. Whether you're after a leisurely day with the kids or an adrenaline-packed weekend, consider Bodenmais for your holiday time. ■



WINTER *Adventures* IN POLAND

By Amanda Palumbo

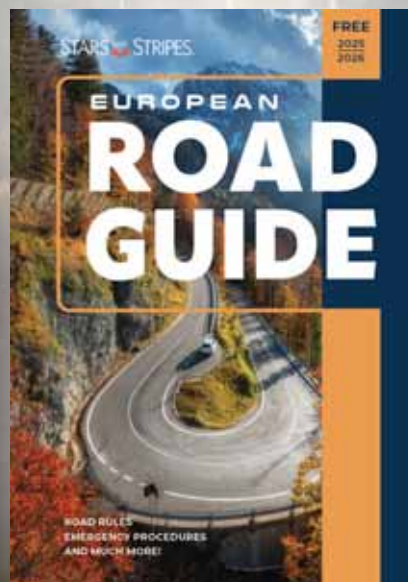
What if there was a place that provided breathtaking mountain views, killer slopes and relaxing spas for a fraction of the costs found in the Alps, and with fewer tourists crowding the lifts?

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ZAKOPANE

Zakopane is a renowned destination for diehard skiers and snowboarders, nestled at the foot of the Tatra Mountains.

The town is the perfect picture of a quintessential European village sitting below snow-capped mountains, with wooden and stone cottages lining cobblestoned streets. It is the epicenter of Goral culture with traditions passed down for centuries from its first Slavic inhabitants.

It is one of the European cities that host the **Ski Jumping World Cup** competitions. In 2026, Zakopane is hosting portions of the competition

Jan. 9–11, Feb. 21–22 and Mar. 19–22. Poland has a long history with this high-flying sport, with its first competition in 1908. Ski jumpers from all around the world hurl themselves off the Great Krokiew. On non-competition days, a lift takes tourists to the jump's observation deck, giving them the same view world-champion jumpers see before they begin their decent.

For those who aren't professional athletes, there are slopes for beginner and intermediate skiers. Then, there is **Kasprowy Wierch**, dubbed the "holy mountain" for Polish skiers, with two very difficult and winding, but fun

ski runs: Gąsienicowa and Goryczkowa.

What makes Zakopane so attractive among winter sports enthusiasts are the prices. An adult day-pass is around 150 Polish złoty, which is approximately 40 dollars. That is about half the cost of some well-known alpine ski areas. Note that while Poland is a member of the EU, they do not use euros; their currency is the Polish złoty (PLN).

When you're not soaring down the Tatra Mountains, there is plenty to see and do in the foothills. If you're staying in the city, which I highly recommend, take time to stroll down

Krupówki, Poland's most famous pedestrian stretch that runs through the heart of the city. Bricked walkways take you past dozens of shops, restaurants and cafes. The Tatra Museum is on this street and dedicated to the history and culture of Zakopane.

Vendors will be selling *Grzaniec*, a Polish hot mulled wine you can sip while you wander the streets. Keep an eye out for *Oscypek*, a delicious smoked cheese that you would probably mistake for a toy or ornament because of the intricate designs carved into its rind. If your feet are too tired to walk, take a horse-drawn carriage through Zakopane's oldest street.

BUKOWINA TATRZAŃSKA

Just a half-hour east of Zakopane is Bukowina Tatrzańska, a small village near the Slovakian border. This is where the **Tour de Pologne** (Tour of Poland) ends. Why would this grueling cycle-ride end in a town of just under 3,000 people? After riding 1,200 kilometers across Poland, cyclists soak in the healing powers of natural hot springs, with water just under 100 degrees Fahrenheit. The end-of-race rally is at **Hotel Bukovina**, a luxury spa sitting in the mountains at an altitude of 1,000 meters.

Another fantastic stop for R&R is **Termy Bukovina**, a family-friendly water park and spa. You may glaze over the words "water park" when looking

for winter activities; however, indoor and outdoor pools are filled with thermal waters, so you can go for a swim even if there are six inches of snow on the ground. One unique feature is the live entertainment you can enjoy while in the thermal baths. Dance and splash in the warm water while listening to DJs spin the latest and greatest tunes. Much of the park is family-friendly; however, do note that nudity is allowed in some of the sauna areas.

While tourists typically flock here for its thermal waters, there are slopes to slide down. If you're lucky enough to visit in February, check out the Highlander Carnival, a festival and dance competition tapping into the village's rich history.



Here are three places to find...



KARPACZ

Not everyone enjoys skiing or snowboarding. Luckily, the town of Karpacz, along the Polish-Czech border in western Poland,

specializes in winter fun off the slopes. Don't worry. There is still top-notch skiing in Karpacz with professionally prepared slopes for both downhill and cross-country skiing.

If you're longing for the hiking days of spring and summer, you can still hit the trails and try **snowshoeing**. Imagine walking along snowy mountain trails in a winter paradise lined with evergreen trees. Like so many things in Poland, you don't have to break the bank to have fun. A two-and-a-half-hour snowshoe walk with training is just 40 złoty (\$11). A romantic moonlight walk is offered for 50 złoty (\$14). There are even full-day snowshoe trips available.

If you still want to barrel through the cold mountain air without all the grueling work associated with skiing, **snow-tubing** is your answer. Not only do you slide down the slopes in an awesome inflatable tube, but there is a lift that will take you up to the top. The fun can

go on and on without losing all that energy slugging uphill. This is a great activity for kids, especially since there is a winter playground nearby.

If you're a fan of fantasy and sci-fi, take a break from the snow and head to **Karkonoskie Tajemnice**, an interactive underground museum dedicated to the local legends and myths of the mountains. It's a hot spot for families, though it's suggested for kids 5+, as some of the displays are of mythical creatures that could be frightening. One of the interactive displays is creating your own "spirit animal." Self-guided tours are available through a multi-lingual iPad.

If none of those activities grab your attention, there are also sleigh rides by torchlight, snow scooters and an ice rink. Before you wrap up your stay, take a ride on the quaint alpine coaster.

A winter getaway in Poland may be just what you need to decompress. It is incredibly family-friendly, there are far fewer crowds and you get a lot more bang for your buck. ■



...winter adventures in Poland.



IT IS WINTER ALL YEAR
AT EUROPE'S LARGEST
INDOOR SNOW ARENA

SNØ

Story by Kat Nickola
Photos by SNØ

The magic of winter can be found year-round (yes, even during the hot summer) at SNØ in Norway. With downhill slopes, cross-country ski trails an ice-climbing wall and a snow castle play yard, Europe's largest indoor snow-sports facility has something for everyone.

There are **downhill slopes** for skiers and snowboarders of all abilities at the SNØ complex, and the controlled climate means excellent snow conditions all the time. With one massive indoor hillside, the five impressive trails are easily accessible to all. So, while you tackle the red Racing Hill, your kids could be improving their skills nearby on the blue Fjon Hill. Three lifts—a chair lift, a

button and a magic carpet bring everyone back to the top with ease.

Park rats can hit the jumps and rails on the 300 meters of **freestyle park**, and then quickly take the chairlift back to do it again. You'll get a lot of airtime here! There are even freeski courses to help you move those terrain park skills to the next level.

For total newbies, there are plenty of ski class options and **equipment rentals** available right at SNØ. Most beginner classes take place over two days, with formal instruction for 90 minutes each day. This is a great place to hone your

abilities. Courses cover all levels of alpine skiing, plus snowboarding, cross-country skiing, and even ice climbing.

How can they fit all that in one facility? Well, the **cross-country skiing course** is ingeniously suspended on a mezzanine in the rafters of the enormous building. At one kilometer in length, it's a no-joke workout space perfect for snow lovers with twists, turns and hills to climb and descend. The total elevation change is an impressive 32 meters.

The Mammoth Wall is a huge **ice-climbing space**, with a 15-meter-high ice block that is one



of the biggest in Europe. There is a front-facing beginner area and a rear technical zone for drop-in pros only; it's a wonder to behold. The wall is especially monumental in the heat of summer when ice climbing enthusiasts, and learners alike, can still train on real ice.

For the younger crowd, the **snow castle play area** is built from...well, snow. It has tunnels, slides and playground fun for kids ages three to ten.

The SNØ structure was built with environmental sustainability in mind. In fact, the building produces energy, sending an excess of 23 percent into Snøbyen—the area around the

facility. This means that both the heat generated from the machinery at SNØ and its extra cooling is not wasted. The Snøbyen district is a sports-minded planned city that currently has a large shopping area and business park in addition to the sports arena.

When you tire of the cold, try some of the other options in Snøbyen such as indoor golf, bowling at the arcade or the trampoline parks. The Jump-Yard is a full-body fun and exercise zone that has it all: trampolines, rock climbing walls, ropes courses, obstacle runs and more. For a more traditional workout, you can visit the modern Sportytude gym.

As a destination for soaking up the wintry atmosphere, the adjacent Thon Hotel Snø is a must. With ski-in / ski-out rooms right on the slope, there is a true resort feel. In addition, there is a café and two winter-inspired restaurants on the premises. The Snøfonna offers a big, varied lunch buffet, while the Rifugio della Nonna keeps things alpine with northern Italian favorites.

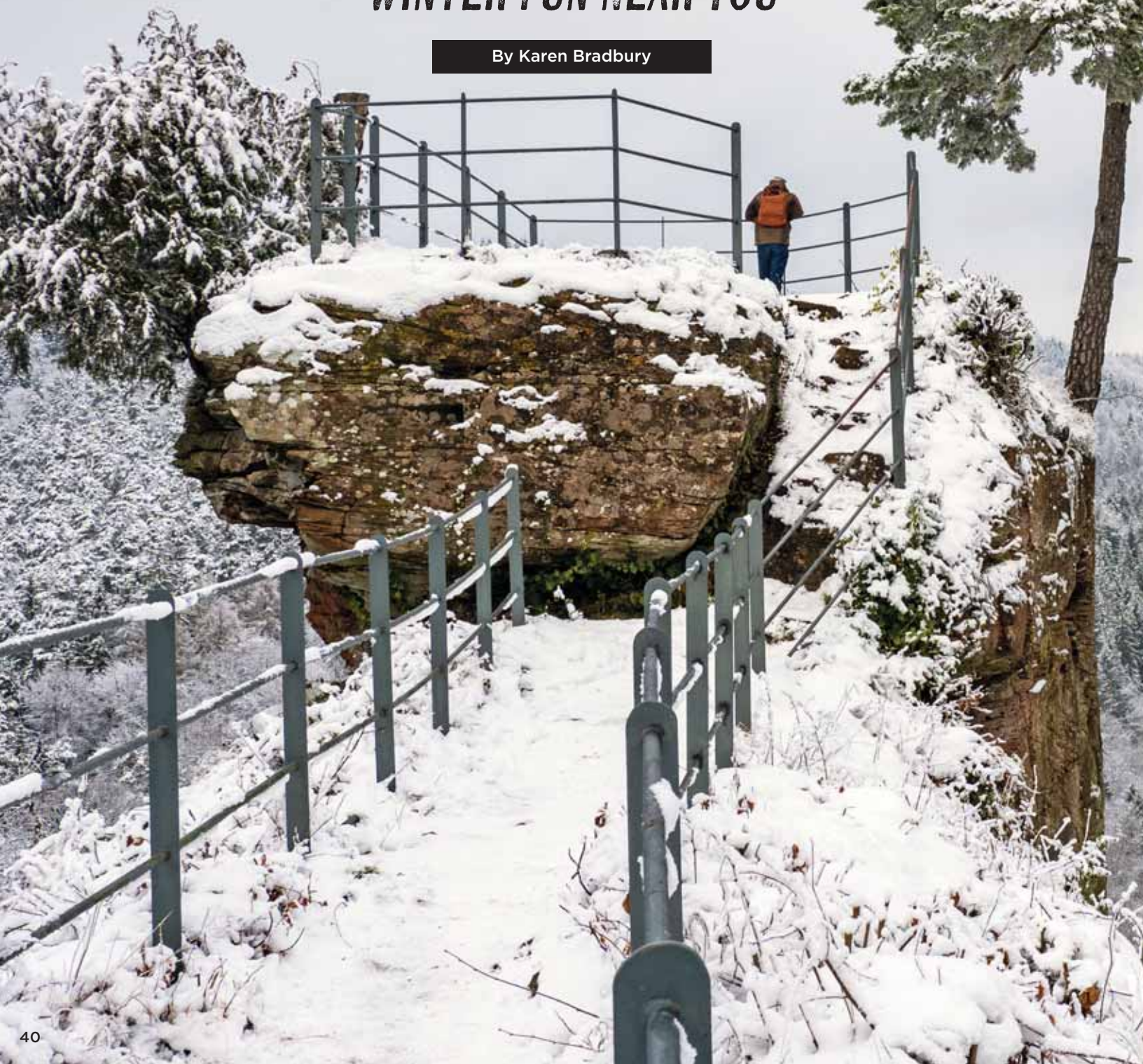
The best part about visiting SNØ is that there will never be a white out nor will the summer sun ever melt your dream of a perfect ski day out.

Visit www.snooslo.no for tickets and information. ■

There's Snow Place Like Home

WINTER FUN NEAR YOU

By Karen Bradbury





LEFT View of the Pfälzerwald | ABOVE The wooden sculpture at the Gipfelrauschen trail near the KMC | RIGHT The Eifel mountain range



Want all of the winter fun

without the hassle of travel? For those stationed in Germany, here are places where you can find some snowy fun and still get home to sleep in your own bed.

Kaiserslautern Military Community (KMC)

In Kaiserslautern, an ice rink will be set up under a massive tent in the Messeplatz from the end of January until March. Nearby, you can also find the **Pfälzerwald**. Some of the more likely places to spot snow here include Johanniskreuz, Leimen and Hermersbergerhof.

Around 40 minutes north of Baumholder, less than an hour northwest of Landstuhl, in Hilscheid, you can ski, snowboard, hike and sled at the **Erbeskopf**. At 2,677 feet, this mountain in the Hunsrück range is Rhineland-Pfalz's tallest mountain and the highest point in Germany west of the Rhine. As part of the Saar-Hunsrück Nature Park, recreational possibilities abound, from skiing and snowboarding to cross-country skiing and tobogganing on groomed slopes. Experienced winter hikers with the proper gear can take an intoxicating hike along the "Gipfelrauschen" trail, a four-mile loop through a forest of firs passing a summit topped by a futuristic wooden sculpture.

Spangdahlem Air Base

About 40 minutes north of Spangdahlem Air Base in Gondenbrett, you can find the **Schwarzer Mann Winter Sports Center**. This mountain in the western part of the Eifel range offers modest ski facilities in the form of two tow lifts, a toboggan run, cross country ski trails and a three mile, signposted and cleared hiking trail.

USAG Ansbach

Even if there isn't snow, Ansbach still provides for winter sporting fun: Speed tubing. Visitors of the **Franconian Christmas Market** (Nov. 27–Dec. 23, 2025) can reach speeds up to 30 km per hour down a 25 meter track in front of Gumbertus Church.

Southwest of Ansbach, the town of **Mittelschenbach** has a small skiing hill with a tow rope perfect for practice runs or sleds. The lift operates when there is ample snow and is lit for dark evening fun.

USAG Bavaria, Garmisch

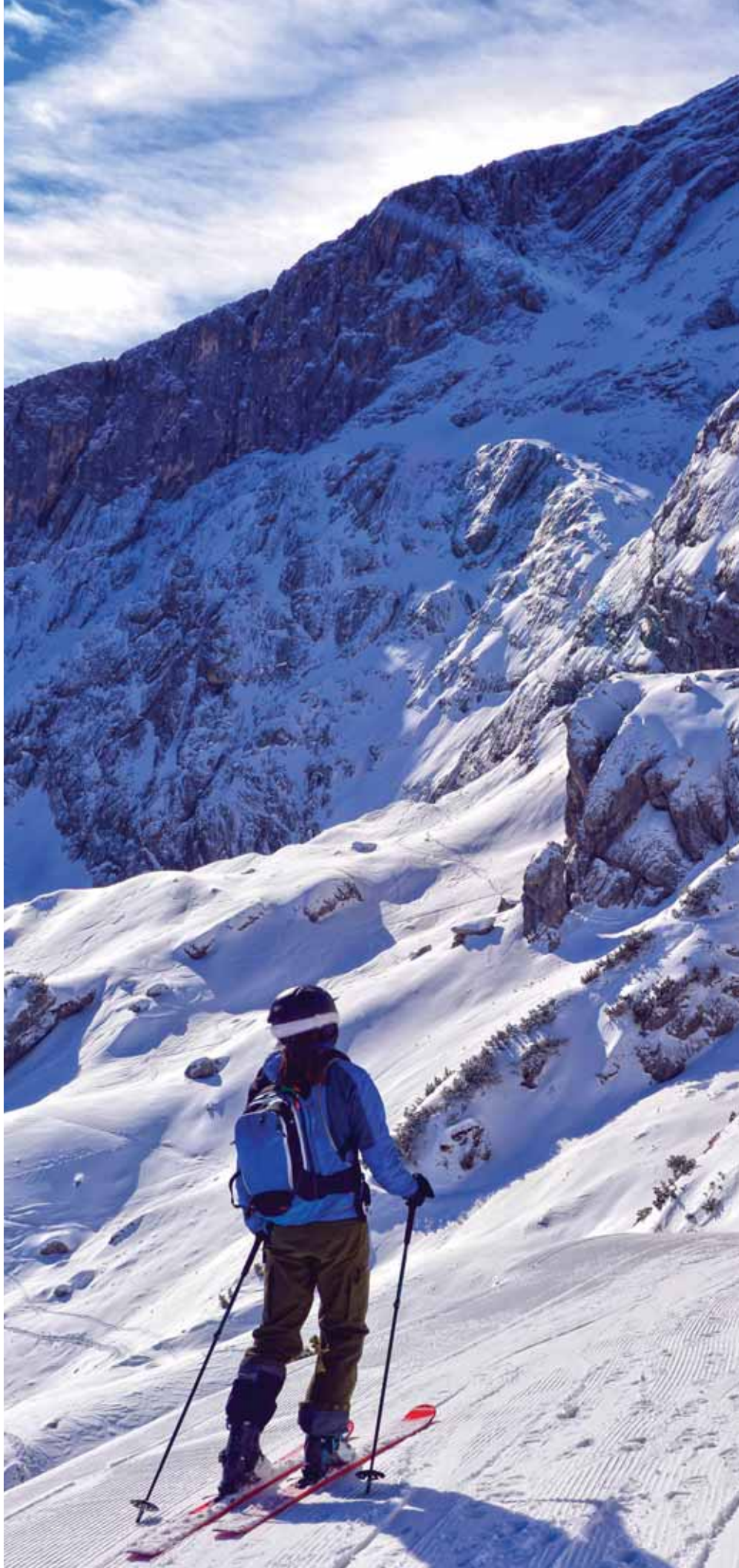
Families in Garmisch can enjoy ice skating. Having opened back in 1936, the **Olympia-Eissport-Zentrum** is a rink with some history behind it. Nowadays it's primarily used for hockey and serves as the home ice for the SC Riessersee, which plays in the second tier of the German Ice Hockey League. The public is welcome to take their turn beginning in November. Go to gw-gap.de for more information on opening dates and times.

Garmisch is also home to some of Europe's poshest skiing opportunities. Two separate areas entice skiers. The **Garmisch Classic**, Germany's largest standalone ski resort and the lower of the two, offers World Cup standard trails. The **Zugspitze** ski resort is higher and more snow-sure. When conditions at the very top of the mountain are poor, skiers can oftentimes still manage to eke out a ski day on the lower slopes. If there's any downside to skiing in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, it's probably the lack of capacity on some of the older lifts, which can lead to long wait times in high season.

USAG Bavaria, Grafenwöhr

For those stationed in or near Grafenwöhr, you can visit **Ochsenkopf**, some 30 miles to the north in the Fichtelgebirge. It is home to northern Bavaria's longest ski slopes and a great place to get started or sharpen intermediate-level skills. The area has around six miles in total of downhill runs, two proper lifts, 12 tow lifts and two snowboard parks. Five rental facilities will kit newbies out, while two ski schools will have them up and running in no time.

Only a half hour west of Vilseck, the tow rope lift in **Eschenfelden** offers a fun downhill slope great for practice skiing or snowboarding. You can also sled in the area. Other small towns in the region also offer similar single-slope lifts for an easy day of snowy fun. Try the hills in **Spies, Pfaben, Wrumstein** or **Schnaittach**, all under an hour from Vilseck or Grafenwöhr.





USAG Stuttgart

For local-ish skiing, the Black Forest's **Feldberg** is likely your best bet and is only about two hours south. With 16 slopes across two hills, Feldberg offers a good variety of options for all abilities of ski and snowboarders. There are also classes, a winter hiking trail and an extensive cross-country skiing course. Adventure enthusiasts can try snowkiting, while the four different toboggan areas offer fun for the entire family.

How about an entire day out sledding instead? The **Rodelzentrum Kaisersbach**, about 90 minutes north of the Stuttgart area, offers two tow ropes for kids on board their sleds on select Saturdays and Sundays beginning in October.

Less than a half-hour from both Patch and Panzer, **Eiswelt Stuttgart** offers hockey, figure skating and ice-skating from October through March and inline and roller skating from mid-May through August. This year's winter season runs through March 29, 2026. The ice is open to the public every day of the week, and for exact opening hours, special event information and tickets, go to their webpage on stuttgart.de. On most Sundays from 5 to 9:30 p.m. an ice disco is held, on Wednesday and Friday evenings, colored spotlights light up the ice as a DJ spins tunes and on Feb 15, 2026 there will be a special children's carnival on the ice.

USAG Wiesbaden

The **Naturpark Taunus** and its winter activities are pretty much in the backyard for those who call Wiesbaden home, roughly 45 minutes away. The Oberreifenberg ski lift next to the youth hostel offers skiing and snowboarding, along with tobogganing on a separate track, and Treisberg has similar facilities.

The **Henkell-Kunsteisbahn** is an open-air skating rink that is open to the public from November through March each year in Wiesbaden. Disco events are held every few weeks. The ice is open daily and you can buy tickets and check exact opening hours at mattiaqua.de. For more ice skating fun, check out the **Ice Dome** in Mainz with a family ice disco every Sunday during the season. ■



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■ ABOVE Kite skiing in Feldberg | BELOW The ice disco at Eiswelt Stuttgart

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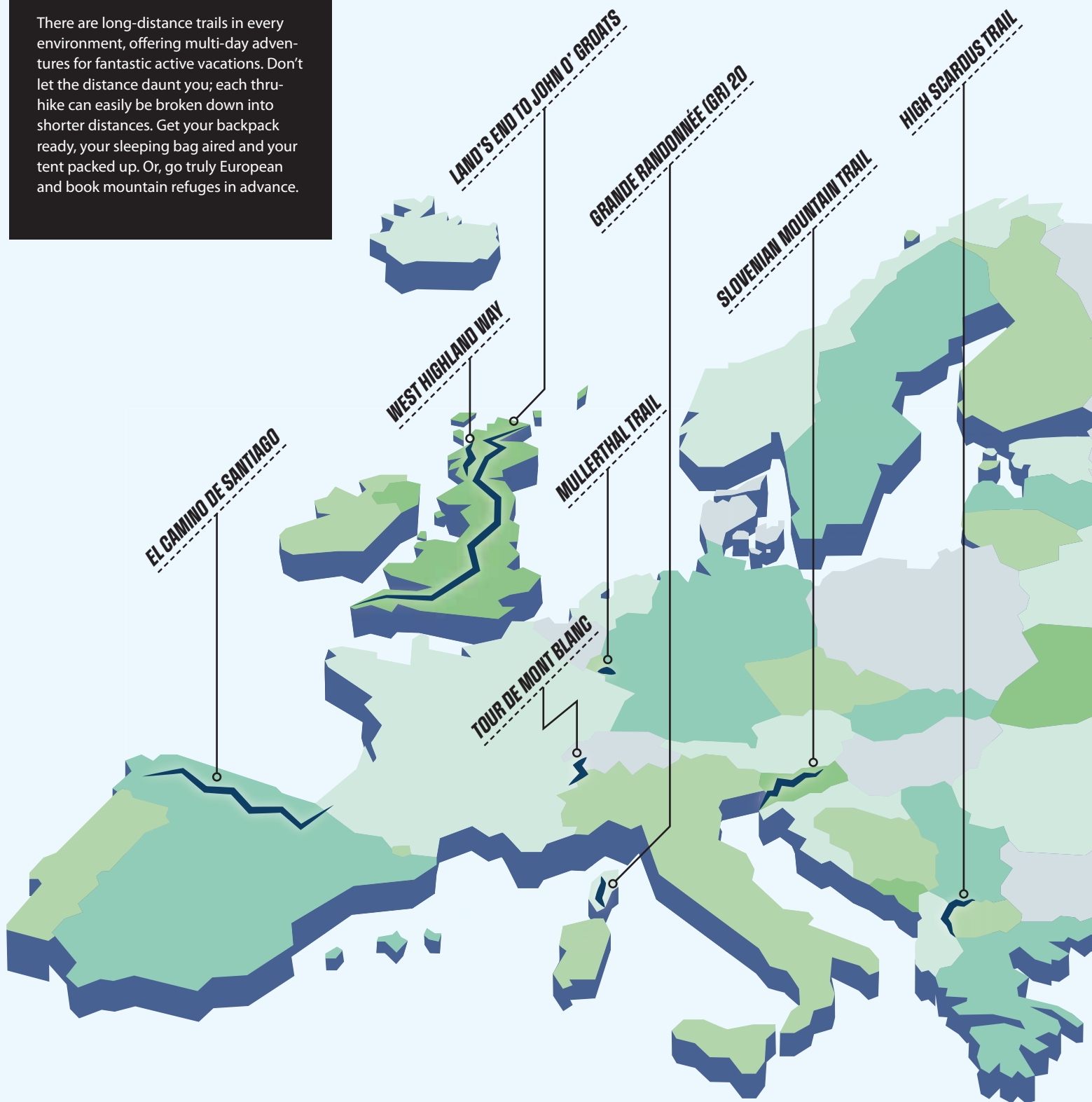
As winter melts into spring, it is time to think about getting out on foot while exploring the wilderness. The European continent is brimming with hiking trails that crisscross countries, traverse mountains, wander through villages and hug coastlines.

There are long-distance trails in every environment, offering multi-day adventures for fantastic active vacations. Don't let the distance daunt you; each thru-hike can easily be broken down into shorter distances. Get your backpack ready, your sleeping bag aired and your tent packed up. Or, go truly European and book mountain refuges in advance.

FOLLOWING THE PATH

Long-Distance Backpacking Trails in Europe

By Stacy Roman and Kat Nickola





Start your trail blazing
journey here:



EL CAMINO DE SANTIAGO

Spain, France, mainland Europe

800+ km

www.jakobswege-europa.de

One of the most well-known long-distance hikes, this pilgrimage is actually a series of different routes which all lead to Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, Spain. Pilgrims wander through the craggy Pyrenees and discover rustic villages of northern Spain. This route is primarily in Spain, but the medieval pilgrimage tradition was to start from your front door, which you can still do from across Europe. Just follow the shells.

GRANDE RANDONNÉE (GR) 20

Corsica, France

180 km

www.pnr.corsica

The beautiful island of Corsica sits in the middle of the aquamarine waters of the Mediterranean. The French territory is also home to one of the most difficult and rugged hikes in Europe. Traversing from the northern end to the southern tip, hikers soak up spectacular mountains and vistas and experience approximately 12,000 meters in elevation gain. This one is for experienced backpackers with a good fitness level. Book refuge stays in advance.

LAND'S END TO JOHN O'GROATS

England, Wales, Scotland

1,400 km

www.landsendjohnogroats.info

This massive trail winds across Great Britain from the southernmost point at Land's End in Wales to the (traditional) northernmost point at John O'Groats in Scotland. Popular with cyclists and walkers, the trail can be done either direction; the name is shortened to LEJOG for south-to-north hikers and JOGLE for those heading north to south. You'll trek through the Scottish Highlands, traverse the scenic Lake and Peak districts of England, and walk the Cornish coastline in Wales.

MULLERTHAL TRAIL

Luxembourg

112 km

www.mullerthal-trail.lu

Perfect for walkers of every ability, the Mullerthal Trail is nestled in the lush forests of eastern Luxembourg. The pathways consist of three loop trails of varying distance that can be done individually, plus five extra tracks to add more interesting destinations. Stunning rock formations, tumbling waterfalls, rolling green meadows and lovely castles dot the landscape along the way.

SLOVENIAN MOUNTAIN TRAIL

Slovenia

617 km

www.slovenska-planinska-pot.si

One of the oldest hiking trails in Europe, the Slovenian Mountain Trail leads adventurers through the Pohorje Hills and Julian Alps. Connecting 23 mountain peaks, the route has gorgeous panoramas across the many alpine ranges and meadow. It begins at the village of Maribor and heads to the coastal town of Ankaran.

TOUR DE MONT BLANC

France, Italy, Switzerland

170 km

www.autourdumontblanc.com

One of France's renowned peaks, Mont Blanc tops out a little more than 4,800 meters tall. Hiking this route means looping the mountain's entire massif, passing through three countries along trails perched above picturesque valleys. The alpine scenery is phenomenal, and you have the option to stay or eat in mountain refuges along the way.

WEST HIGHLAND WAY

Scotland

150 km

www.westhighlandway.org

The West Highland Way is a fabulous, rugged hike through Scotland's heartland. Beginning just north of Glasgow in the small village of Milngavie, backpackers make their way past scenic lochs, rocky peaks, marshy bogs and stunning glens before finishing further north in Fort William.

HIGH SCARDUS TRAIL

Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia

362 km

www.high-scardus-trail.com

The mountains of the western Balkans offer breathtaking vista and vast empty spaces. These high arid plains and rocky peaks have less infrastructure than other destinations on this list; however, many backcountry hikers will see that as a benefit. Orienteering is a requirement here, as is full self-sufficiency.

Europe is full of amazing long-distance walks. Dust off your hiking boots, plot your next adventure and hit the trails. ■

HEALING HEAT

How To Visit a Sauna for Athletic Recovery

By Kat Nickola



Relaxing in a sauna or thermal pool after long, active days outside can relieve muscle aches, increase recovery time and lower stress levels.

Take a trip to a wellness center between skiing and snowboarding and you may end up having more energy and endurance for longer days on the slopes.

But let's get this cleared up right away: Yes, there is respectful co-ed nudity. No, it's not everywhere. In fact, most wellness centers offer access to their swimming and thermal pools in an all-ages, swimsuits-required part of the complex. The textile-free sauna spaces are conservatively private, well-marked and can only be accessed with a special bracelet. So, you (or your kid) won't accidentally wander into an uncomfortable situation.

Having said, that, you should totally give the textile-free sauna a try. These are adult (usually 16+) spaces full of relaxation beds, small pools, loungers, and a variety of dry and wet saunas. If nudity is uncharted water for you, just know that almost everyone wears a robe while walking around, and it's fine to keep a towel wrapped around yourself inside any dry sauna.



How to Sauna

- 1. Bring the basics.** You need a towel and flip-flops. I also recommend a robe. Phones and electronics must remain in lockers, but books and water bottles are welcome. It is polite to secure long hair in a braid or bun.
- 2. Find your way inside.** Check-in at the counter (reservations may be needed) and specify that you want to visit the sauna space, the pool area or both. You will be given a wristband that opens a locker, allows entrance to the areas you've paid for and keeps track of any food or drink purchases. Pay the tab on your way out.
- 3. Enter the textile-free zone.** Leave your street clothes and any electronics in your locker. Wear your swimsuit and flip flops and rinse off in the showers. Then, bring your towel and robe to the entrance of the textile-free area; scan your bracelet for entry. Inside, remove your swimsuit. Use a cubby to stash it. It's normal to wear your robe or towel when walking around or lounging. Explore the whole space, even outside!



- 4. Sauna time.** Choose a sauna and hang your robe on a hook outside the door. Take off your flip-flops. If it is a dry sauna, bring your towel. Inside, place your towel on the wooden bench and sit or lie on it; you may also wrap it around yourself, as long as your bottom isn't touching the wooden bench. Don't bring your towel in a wet sauna; instead, use the small hose to rinse off the tiled seat before and after use.
- 5. Participate in an Aufguss.** These dry sauna health treatments are a highlight and offer respiratory benefits that can aid in athlete recovery. A posted schedule includes the time, type of treatment and location. Find the correct sauna and claim a spot 5–10 minutes early. Do not walk in late or interrupt a session. You may find a bowl of ice outside; it is optional for you to take a handful to help handle the heat. I suggest sitting on a low bench where the heat is less extreme. An employee will place the infusion on the heat source so it can permeate the sauna before wafting hot air around with a towel or huge fan. You will sweat and may feel burnt. Breathe deeply. There are usually three rounds and the entire ritual lasts 15–20 minutes.



For readers who are new to European sauna culture, here are some large wellness centers perfect for your first plunge.

Aqua Dome, Austria

Located near some of the best skiing in the Ötztal valley, the aqua dome is a futuristic-looking wellness center. It has breathtaking views of the mountains from the hot pools in the window-filled dome or the outdoor pools on pedestals, reminiscent of "The Jetsons." The textile-free sauna space is a contrast of natural woods and nature-inspired lounges with an hourly Aufguss program. www.aqua-dome.at

Therme Erding, Germany

In northern Munich, this tropical resort is one of Europe's largest. In addition to the thermal pools, the adventure pool area is full of water slides. However, it's the Roman-themed 'Sauna World' that makes this a recovery paradise. With a massive thermal pool, a plethora of themed saunas, swim-up watering holes, and unique scheduled experiences, this place is easily worth an entire day. www.therme-erding.de

Leukerbad, Switzerland

There are multiple places to go in this alpine resort where the local, naturally-occurring hot thermal waters have been a destination since Roman times. The large, modern Leukerbad Therme is known for all its hot water pools and slides in addition to the textile-free sauna space with incredible views over the mountains. Walliser Alpen Therme offers a health-oriented experience with therapeutic pools, an extensive sauna village and an 11-step Roman bathing ritual. www.leukerbad.ch ■

IN THE FIELD

Our Stars and Stripes team is out in the field finding the best places in Europe so we can pass that intel on to you.

Here are our favorite spots to ski and snowboard.



"Cortina d'Ampezzo is the only ski destination that I've visited in Europe so far, but I imagine it will be hard to beat as my favorite. I appreciated that it had a huge variety of runs for beginners like me, and the views were incredible. The cute town, the pink sunset reflecting on the snowy peaks of the mountain, the food—all made for cinematic moments while there, and now, memories."

KATIE WELLS, WRITER



"Me on the cross-country ski trails below the Zugspitze in my happy place, Ehrwald, Austria, where Swiss beauty meets German prices, and there are actual slopes in every direction for those who prefer to ski at an angle."

MANDY MILLS, GRAPHIC DESIGNER



"My favorite is the Bergkastel ski area in Nauders, Austria. My family is a mix of two skiers and two non-skiers. Nauders is extremely convenient for families such as ours. It has a nice ski run, but also has one of the longest natural toboggan runs (8 km) in Tyrol. Nauders has a bonus area about two blocks from the middle of town that has a wide area with a few bunny hills and an outdoor skating rink. My son had a blast being pushed down the bunny hills on a stroller-sled."

CARRIE FARRELL, PUBLISHING & MEDIA DESIGN, MANAGER

"My personal experience is with the town of Kitzbühel, Austria. It is the Aspen of Europe, where the rich come to play, but there were plenty of affordable places in the outskirts. You can ski right into town on the world-famous Hahnenkamm downhill course. I skied it at a normal pace, never fell, and it took me at least 45 minutes. I ventured off looking for more ski terrain and came across a bar, or Kneipe in the middle of the woods. I was like, this is so cool! I clicked off my skis and went in for a Bier. Good times!"

JEFF TEESLINK, MULTIMEDIA CONSULTANT

"The Italian ski town of Cervinia! It's the Italian (less costly than Swiss) side of the Matterhorn and an incredible place to learn how to ski. We stayed in an apartment right across from the lifts. I took lessons for two days and was hitting red runs by the end! There are countless rental shops for beginners like me, and the ski instructors were so patient and kind."

KATELIN FRY, MARKETING COORDINATOR



"I learned to cross-country ski when I was in the Army. I was assigned to the 11th ADA Signal Battalion as a Remote Site Commander at Radio Site Mönchberg. In the winter, the road to our site was unreachable by vehicle due to the heavy snowfall. While I was at the Outdoor Recreation Center, they asked if we needed skis, and that's how I learned to cross country ski. Later, my daughter taught me to snowboard. Over the last seven years, I have selected Feldberg in the Black Forest to celebrate my birthday with the family. We love the high peaks of the Black Forest, which provide a variety of slopes suitable for all skill levels."

RENÉ JOYNER, INFORMATION SYSTEMS MANAGER

Read about René in the Black Forest



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