

A powdery paradise

Ditch pretentious St Moritz and over-familiar Gstaad for picturesque St Anton am Arlberg

Fareeda Kanga
mirrorfeedback@timesgroup.com

TWEETS @MumbaiMirror

In a label-obsessed society, even holiday destinations aren't spared. So if you find yourself rolling your eyes on seeing your school-mates you recently unfriended on Facebook on the skiing slopes of Verbier, Saint Moritz or Courchevel, we do have a solution. Fortunately, skiing in Europe is not merely the domain of the rich and the vacuous — there are alpine adventures for all budgets and tastes, and personalities, come to think of it.

Perched on the western end of the Austrian Alps, St Anton am Arlberg offers breathtaking vistas, glee-inducing glaciers and lush valleys. With just 2,680 odd inhabitants, you do actually end up receiving waves and greetings from locals who are only too happy to chat or offer you a pint of homemade brew. This is the anti-Yash Chopra vacation.

The Bergschloss Hotel, with its wooden chalet style property, for example, exudes Tyrolean charm and a laidback vibe, and is oddly miles above the glitzy architecture of its swankier cousins.

Its advanced terrain attracts hardcore skiers, placing it on par with Chamonix and Jackson Hole. Having

hosted the Alpine Skiing World Championships on several occasions, most recently in 2001, it is rated amongst the top five resorts in the Alps. Because of the ample amount of snow that falls here (it is almost guaranteed), some of the choicest downhill skiing in the world can be experienced at a fraction of the cost of the big names right here.

And there is variety for those in the know: St Anton boasts of 305km of groomed pistes, 200 km of off-piste itineraries and over 55 km² of challenging off-piste terrain. The varied terrain has also made it the home of the modern ski technique, eponymously called 'The Arlberg'. The Arlberg school of skiing has been adopted by the best ski instructors and schools across the globe.

Martina, our genial guide, takes us on a vertiginous trek up the famous Valluga Peak. At a height of 2,809 m, it is the highest mountain in St Anton. As we sheepishly tell her we aren't fit enough for the adventure, she assuages our desi non-athleticism. "I know you Indians! Don't worry, we will go up by cable car," smiles. We love her already.

The best part about this unpretentious ski town is the amazing amount of non-ski related activities both in winter and summer. There is a fun park, an illuminated toboggan run, ice rinks for skating and curling, as well as a wellness centre with its indoor pool, sauna and steam baths.

In the summer, there's golf, tennis, horse-riding or, to make life simpler, merely put on a thick pair of socks and sturdy boots and go trekking in the hills to witness the magical blooming of Edelweiss blossoms (a floral species made famous courtesy Julie Andrews and Christopher Plummer's idyllic lullaby from *The Sound of Music*). Don't be surprised if you find yourself singing the same on the slopes of this paradise.

FACT FILE



Getting there

Fly to Frankfurt on Lufthansa and take a connection to Innsbruck on Austrian Air. Or fly Swiss to Zurich and drive to Innsbruck in around 3.5 hours. St. Anton is a one-hour drive from Innsbruck.