

Discovering Tyrol's peaks and meadows

By Fareeda Kanga | Posted 21-Sep-2014

After all efforts to find ideal skiing conditions on her vacation fail, Fareeda Kanga discovers a whole new side to the Alps in Tyrol, a state in western Austria. Dizzying views from atop the 9,400-high Valluga peak, a meadow full of Edelweiss flowers and local cuisine like none other leave her rather enchanted

Tyrol
Best time to visit: October-March
You need: 4 days

Day One of our quest to find the best snow in the Alps hasn't been entirely successful. The summer sun is relentless and our attempt to hit the beginner's slopes is waylaid.



A rustic log cabin in the Arlberg Mountains. Pics/Fareeda Kanga

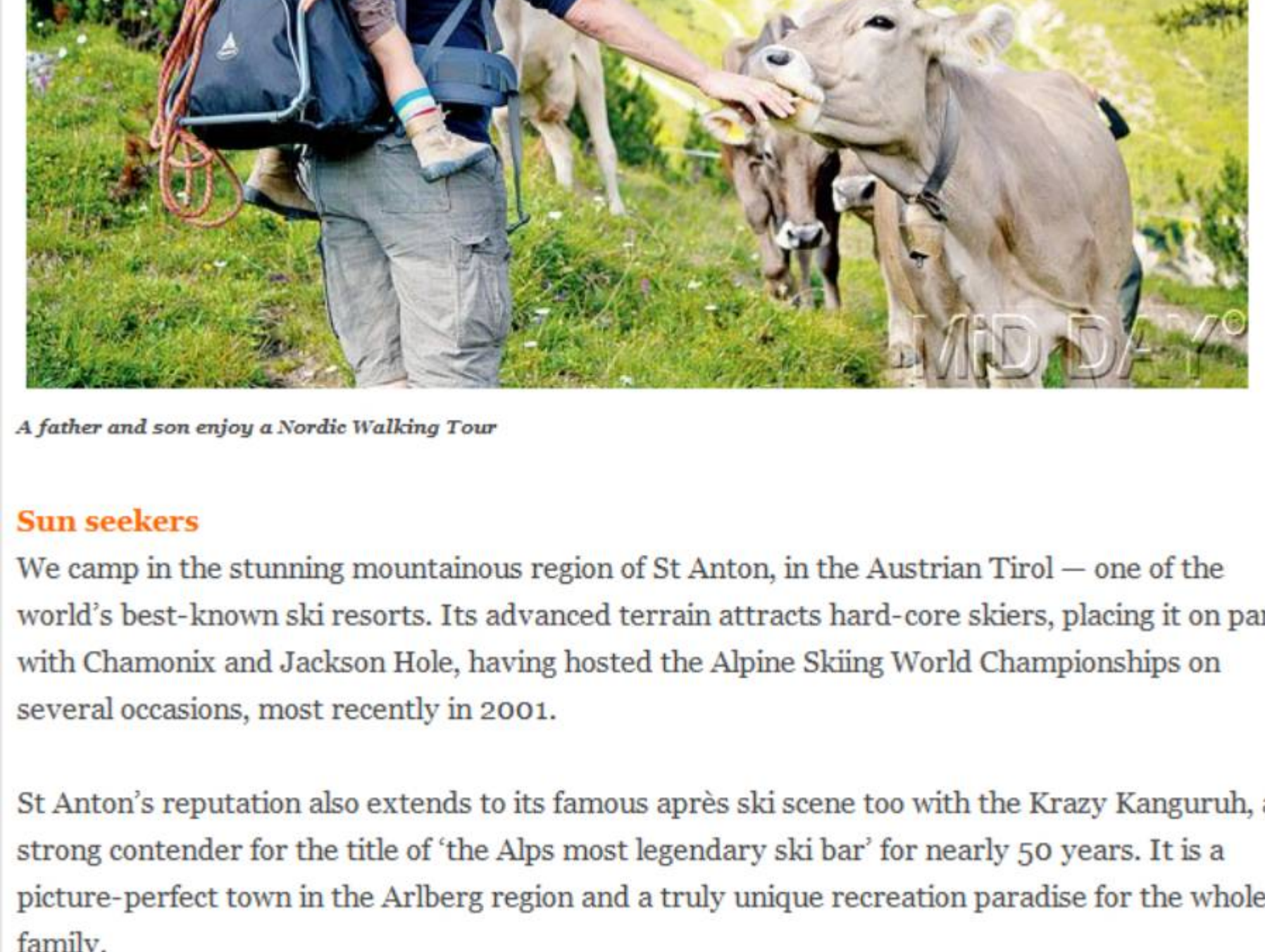
We're travelling through a region in Austria that most Indian tourists seldom venture through. This is a place that boasts of 500 three-thousanders: peaks that rise more than 3,000 meters above sea level. Add to this the scenic spectacle of fabulous views, incredible rock formations and imposing canyons. The perennially snow-dusted glaciers stretch as far as the eye can see.



The serene landscape of St Anton

Welcome to Tyrol, Austria's third largest province.

Until recently, the Tyrolean Alps never really received the kind of publicity their Swiss counterparts have. But things are changing. With discerning travellers perennially searching the globe for that next big destination, this geographically blessed region, which straddles Italian, Austrian and German cultures, is gradually getting noticed.



A father and son enjoy a Nordic Walking Tour

Sun seekers

We camp in the stunning mountainous region of St Anton, in the Austrian Tirol – one of the world's best-known ski resorts. Its advanced terrain attracts hard-core skiers, placing it on par with Chamonix and Jackson Hole, having hosted the Alpine Skiing World Championships on several occasions, most recently in 2001.

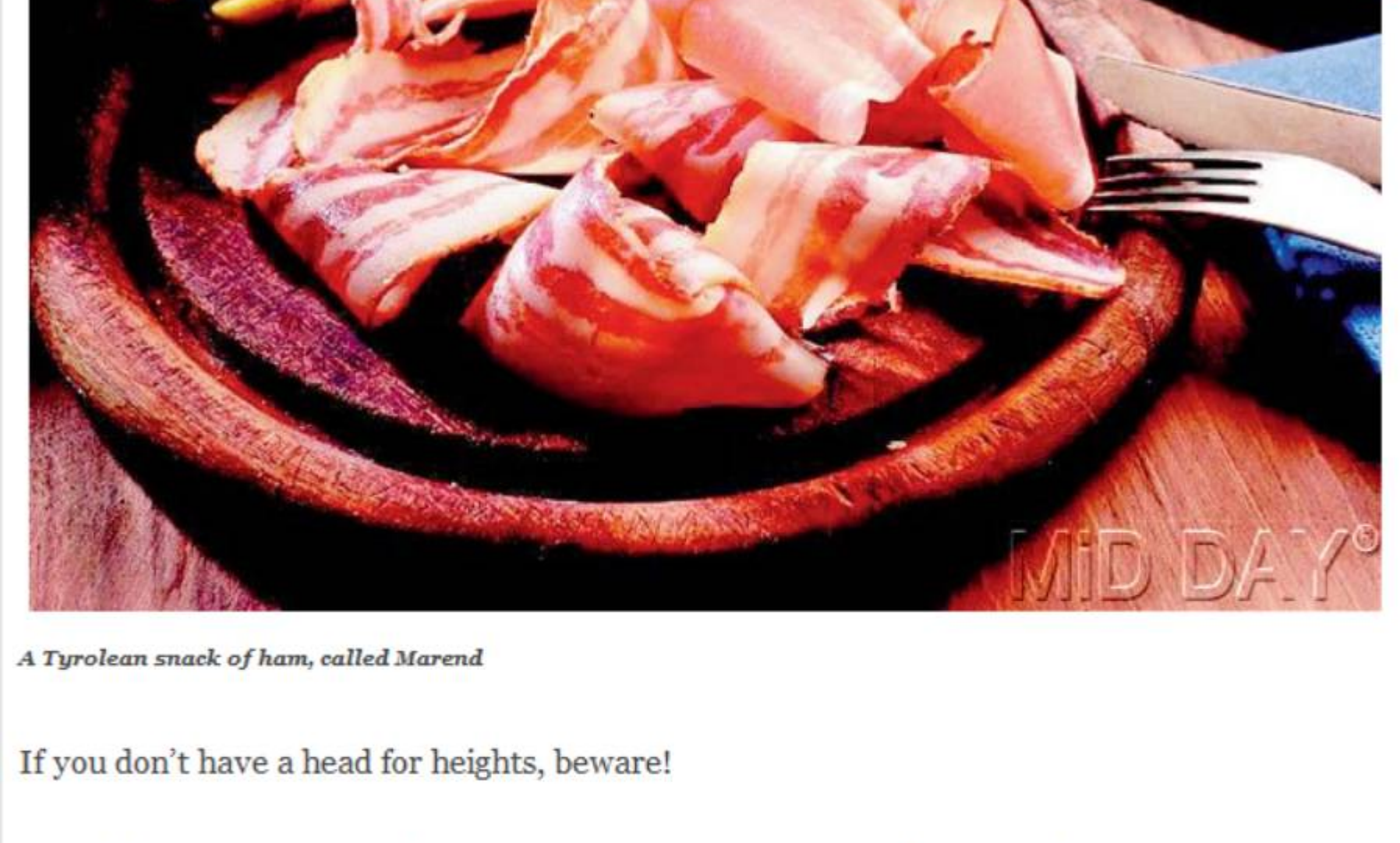
St Anton's reputation also extends to its famous après ski scene too with the Krazy Kanguruh, a strong contender for the title of 'the Alps most legendary ski bar' for nearly 50 years. It is a picture-perfect town in the Arlberg region and a truly unique recreation paradise for the whole family.



The quaint town centre of St Anton

Given the weather gods' disdain, Miriam, our guide, has to rejig our schedule that was supposed to include introductory ski lessons on an off-piste terrain known for beginners' classes.

The imposing Valluga Peak at 9,400 feet is where we are headed for a bird's eye view of the mountainous region. The large Valluga I cable car takes people towards the top of this mountain, which is a favourite of advanced skiers from around the world. Armchair enthusiasts like us, on the other hand, merely head upward to enjoy the scenery. In summer, the powdery white snow is obviously missing, and the hills and valleys are bedecked with an array of colourful flowers in verdant hues. The icing on the cake is witnessing a meadow full of Edelweiss flowers in full bloom (remember Julie Andrews' lilting lullaby Edelweiss in the film, The Sound of Music?) nearing the summit of our hike.

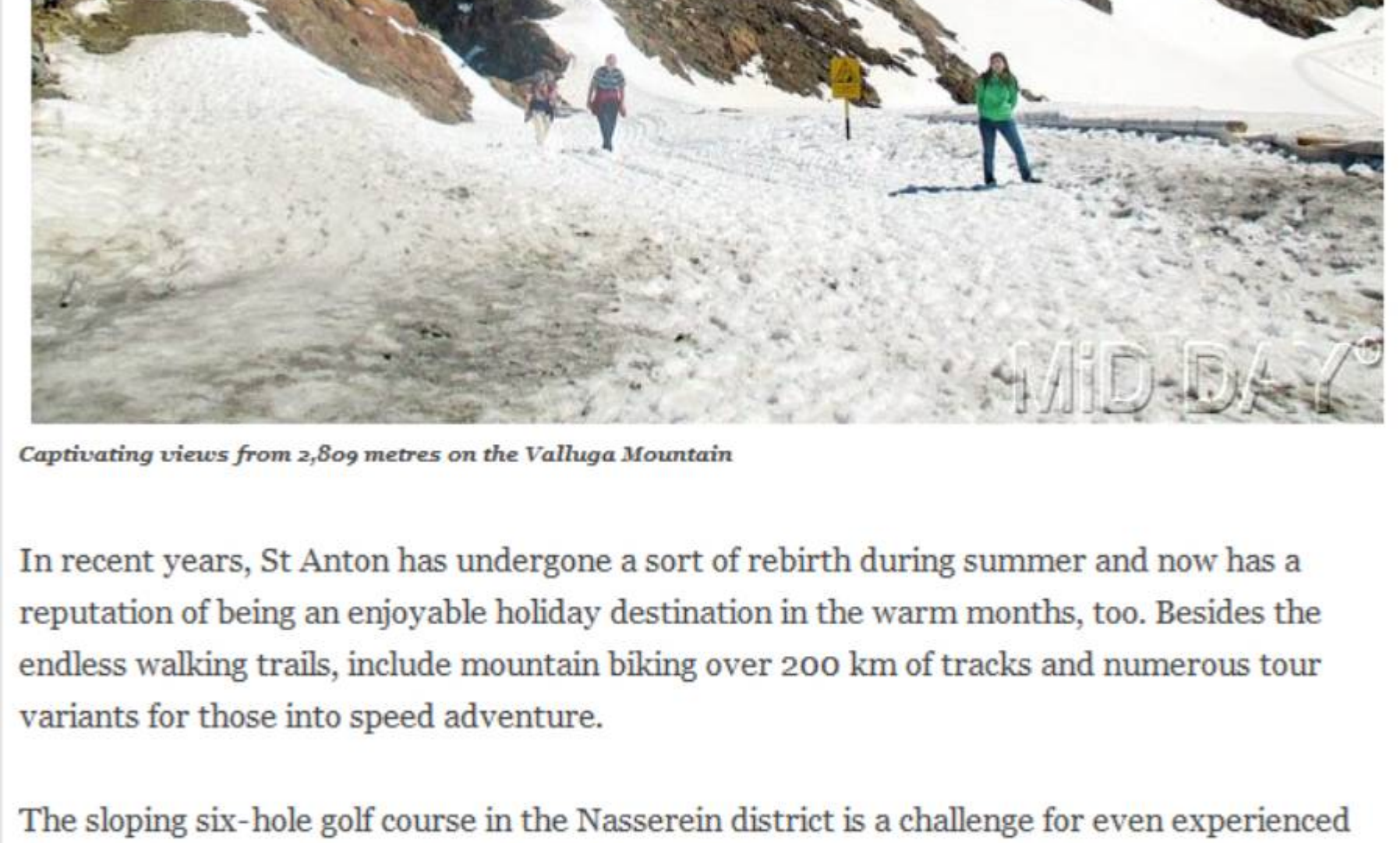


A Tyrolean snack of ham, called Marend

If you don't have a head for heights, beware!

From the summit of the Valluga Peak, we realise just how unfit some of us are as 80-year-old grandmothers zip down effortlessly past us (at break-neck speed) whilst we cautiously venture down the hilly climbs. Luckily for novices, the efficient signposting system provides detailed information about each destination and route, distance, time and difficulty level.

There is a network of paths through picturesque landscape making up a total distance of 300 km, which was awarded the Tyrolean Wandergütesiegel – Walkers' Quality Seal.



Captivating views from 2,809 metres on the Valluga Mountain

In recent years, St Anton has undergone a sort of rebirth during summer and now has a reputation of being an enjoyable holiday destination in the warm months, too. Besides the endless walking trails, include mountain biking over 200 km of tracks and numerous tour variants for those into speed adventure.

The sloping six-hole golf course in the Nasserein district is a challenge for even experienced golfers. Whilst families can enjoy gentle experiences on the adventure walks, which appeal to all the senses. The Wonder Wander Way around the Senn Hut, at an altitude of 1500 metres, familiarises one with alpine nature.

A taste of Tyrol

After a hectic trek, my only concern is a rumbling stomach that yearns to sample the local cuisine. The backbone of Tyrolean cuisine is the strong emphasis on simple, fresh produce procured locally. In the clean, pristine mountain air, every ingredient –fruits, vegetables, dairy produce and meats – is aromatic and ripe with fresh flavours.

Whilst Vienna is famous for the 'Weiner Schnitzel' and Sacher Torte', in Tyrol it's an afternoon farmer's snack called Tyrolean Marend which usually consists of Tyrolean speck (a distinctively juniper-flavoured ham that is smoked and salt-cured), mountain cheese, cured sausages, and fresh-cut bread. In the days gone by, the Marend was the snack for the hard-working mountain farmers; today it is more of a ceremonial and traditional dish. Deeply rooted in tradition, the Marend is consumed in the company of others with a glass of wine, beer, or a shot of schnapps.

Some of the other most popular Tyrolean dishes that we sample include the Tyrolean Groestl (roasted potatoes, speck, and onions topped off with a fried egg), Tyrolean Kaesepaetzle (spaetzle sautéed with a variety of mountain cheeses and garnished with fried onions and fresh chive), and finally to round off a heavy meal it's the grand finale – the Brandenburg Pruegeltorte (also called Tree Cake or Cake of Kings). The Pruegeltorte is made on a spit by brushing on even layers of batter and then rotating the spit around an open heat source. Each layer is allowed to brown before a new layer of batter is poured.

Tyrol may not be the first place which comes to your mind when you think of the Alps, but after taking in its dazzling sights, it remains unforgettable in memory.

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

Where to stay: Hotel Schwarzer Adler: Since 1570, the 'Black Eagle' welcomes travellers in a resplendent surrounding. From 75 euros per head.

Hotel Bergschossl: A quaint, family-run B&B, perfect as a base to hit the ski slopes. Doubles 50-60 euros per head. If you want to splurge, stay at the Sofitel Munich BayerPost situated in a historic building with a contemporary design. (www.sofitel.com)