

BLAZING A SNOW TRAIL

Enjoy a perfect winter break on powder-laden slopes.

As winter unfolds and throws a blanket of white gold over the many wondrous vertical limits across the world, we scout out a few that remain a favourite with powder hounds.

by Smitha Sadanandan

Whistler Blackcomb

British Columbia, Canada.

Whistler Blackcomb is the official alpine skiing venue for many an international event. Heli-skiing here is a must-do activity and can be done till April.

Deep snow, untracked powder and incredible terrain is what brings avid skiers to Whistler Blackcomb, British Columbia, Canada. The Whistler, which hosted the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, makes for an equally good choice for family vacations with its fair share of luxury resorts, entertainment and myriad festivals. It offers the most skiable terrain in North America: 8,171 acres, 200+ runs, 16 alpine bowls and three glaciers. The two side-by-side mountains receive, on an average, 469 inches of snow annually, making it one of the longest ski seasons in North America. Heli-skiing in Whistler is a must-do activity; explore the terrain all through till April. Care to go on a ride of a lifetime?

Where: This premier mountain resort is situated in the Resort Municipality of Whistler in the Coast Mountains of British Columbia, 125 kilometres from Vancouver.

Frames Tip: There's a lot you can do at Whistler – snowmobiling, sleigh rides, tubing or stroll into the slope side bars and say cheers to winter. Whistler Blackcomb has some of North America's liveliest après ski. In the summer, it offers a variety of activities, including hiking and biking trails and sightseeing on the 'Peak 2 Peak' gondola.

W: whistlerblackcomb.com



Chamonix
Mont Blanc, France.

Chamonix nestles in a valley in the quiet shadows of the mighty and spectacular summit Mont Blanc – and hemmed in by France, Switzerland and Italy. In winter, Mont Blanc, Western Europe’s highest mountain, takes centre stage beneath the electric blue skies flecked with puffy white clouds.

Thrill-seekers eager to hit the slopes arrive in hordes ready to test their mettle against the mountain and its dizzying vertical heights – wooed by inch-over-inch of snow and 170 years of skiing history. Chamonix with many options of hotels, chalets, restaurants and resorts, is ideal for a winter vacation break. If carving through powder is your idea of fun, then you will find that most of Chamonix’s pistes and slopes are pretty much above the treeline; the tough runs, challenging slopes and the deep snow are bound to make you ski happy. The rugged, icy terrains are also a haven for advanced snowboarders.

Chamonix, which hosted the first Winter Olympics in 1924, is known for its rugged, icy terrains – a haven for advanced snowboarders. The hotels, chalets and resorts in Chamonix offer an ideal option for winter vacation break.

Where: Chamonix, one of the oldest ski resorts in France, is situated near the massive peaks of the Aiguilles Rouges. The Chamonix-Mont Blanc Valley is easily accessible from two international airports in the immediate vicinity: Lyon-Saint Exupery International airport (225 kilometres from Chamonix) and Geneva International Airport (85 kilometres).

Frames Tip: The Aiguille du Midi cable car takes you up to 3,842 metres, offering an

unforgettable view of Mont Blanc and the Alps – and the starting point for a descent through the Vallée Blanche, a paradise of powder skiing. The winter season begins mid-December and lifts remain open until early May, with excellent spring ski conditions in April (minimum and maximum altitudes of the resort: 1,035 metres – 3,842 metres). Les Houches has delightful forest runs for snowriders and is ideal for family skiing.

W: chamonix.com



Kitzbühel
Tyrol, Austria.

The rich, the famous and the hardcore skiers – these are who you’ll find on Kitzbühel’s ice-glazed slopes every winter. Ski fanatics from all over Europe descend on to the mountain hamlet to revel in the sportive spirit as this sports mecca, nestled between Kitzbühel Horn and the Hahnenkamm, unveils its most charming and dare-devilry traits.

A celebrity hot spot, Kitzbühel boasts of a ski tradition that is unique to the Alps. There’s a lot that makes this historic city a fascinating winter destination when smothered with snow: Hahnenkamm Races, the Valartis Snow Polo World Cup, traditional Christmas market and New Year fireworks. The snow-assured ski resort offers some of the most difficult ski runs in the world, while the ‘streif’ of the mountains of the Kitzbühel Alps are great for carving. The 170 kilometres of slopes, 32 kilometres of ski pistes are a skier’s delight.

Kitzbühel plays host to the World Cup ski races – be there, be part of the excitement.

Where: Kitzbühel, one of Austria’s fanciest winter sports resorts and favourite destinations, is situated in Tyrol in the Kitzbühel Alps. It is about 120 kilometres from Munich. Most visitors use Munich’s international airport for transit. Innsbruck (95 kilometres) and Salzburg (80 kilometres) are also worth a visit while on a holiday here.

Frames Tip: The villages of Reith, Aurach and Jochberg are exciting holiday destinations. For a dose of adrenaline rush, turn to Kitzbühel’s series of superlative runs, of which 69 kilometres are rated easy (blue), 77 kilometres intermediate (red) and 24 kilometres difficult (black).

W: kitzbuehel.com

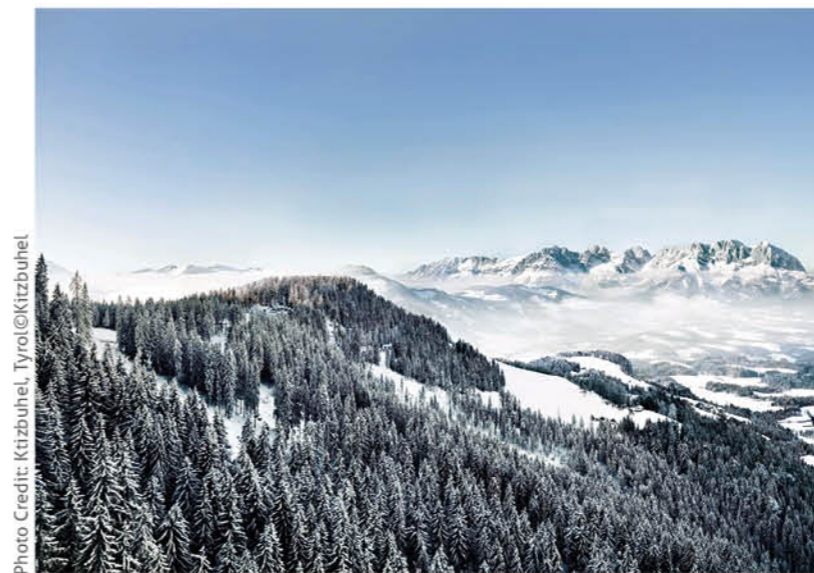


Photo Credit: Kitzbuehel, Tyrol@Kitzbuehel



Photo Credit: Snowboarding in Kitzbuehel, Tyrol@Kitzbuehel

Zermatt

Valais, Switzerland.

The jagged silhouette of the pyramid-shaped Matterhorn, Zermatt's iconic Alpine peak, towers over the spectacular terrain, looking almost invincible. Ancient chalets and barns coexist, perhaps happily, with opulent buildings and luxury resorts. More than 3,000 alpinists climb the Matterhorn every year, and more follow suit.

The picturesque village of Zermatt is car-free and the air is clear, dry and clean: since 1947, only electric cars without a combustion engine have been operating in the village. The four sightseeing points, Gornergrat, Matterhorn Glacier Paradise, Rothorn Paradise and Schwarzsee Paradise, offer splendid views over the mountains. Zermatt offers mile after mile of beautiful runs, besides its 350 kilometres of prepared pistes extending to Italy in winter. The slopes are best for experienced free riders.

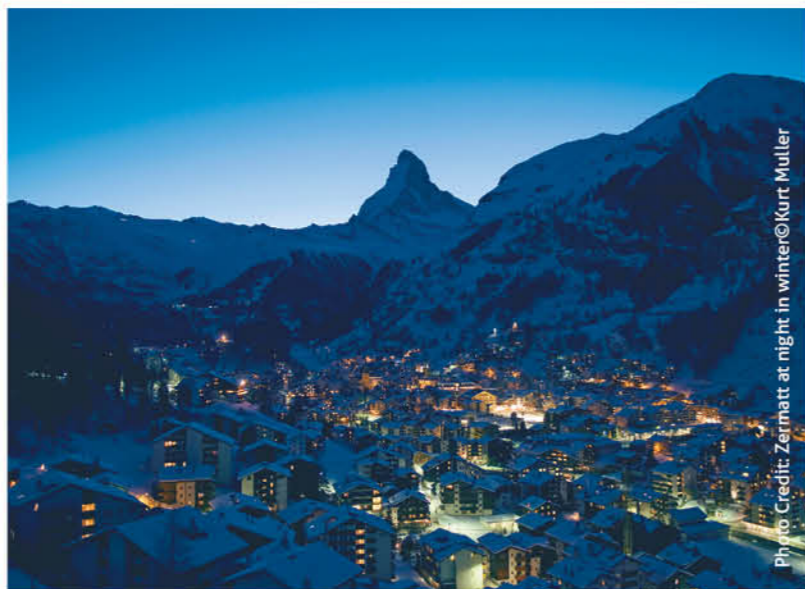


Photo Credit: Zermatt at night in winter©Kurt Muller



Photo Credit: Ice rink©Zermatt



Photo Credit: Helitasking with Air Zermatt©Air Zermatt

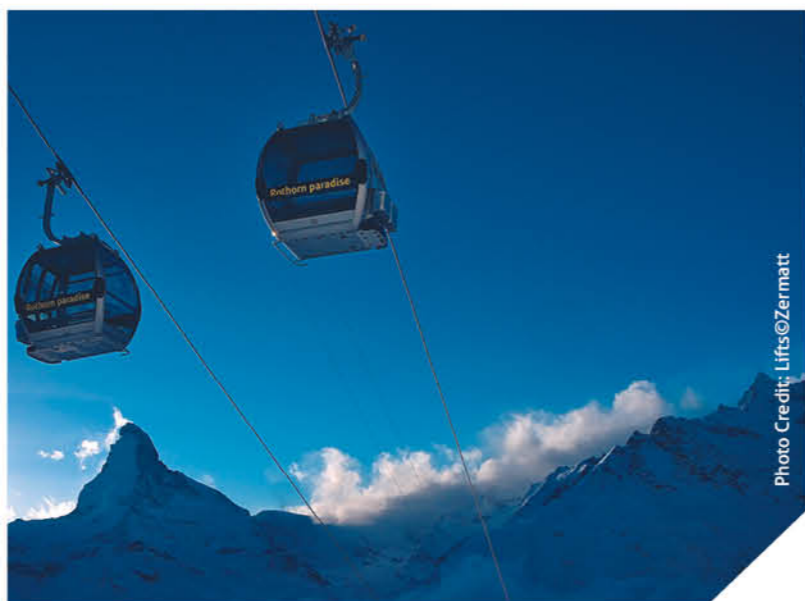


Photo Credit: Lifts©Zermatt

Where: On the Italian border of the canton of Valais in the west of Switzerland, at the end of the 30 kilometre-long Nikolaital lies Zermatt. Zermatt is located at the foot of the Matterhorn, the most photographed mountain in the world. The nearest airports are

in Sion (80 kilometres) and Geneva (241 kilometres).

Frames Tip: The scenic Matterhorn ski paradise extends from the Rothorn, through Gornergrat, the Matterhorn glacier paradise and the Schwarzsee – all the more reason why you

should go skiing here. And if you love ski tours, spring time is when you should march with an experienced mountain guide to the crunch of snow, heading all the way up the Allalinhorn, Breithorn and Strahlhorn.

W: zermatt.ch

Travel aboard the Glacier Express, considered the cult train for railway fans, and zip across the Matterhorn to Piz Palù and St. Moritz for a picturesque journey of a lifetime.

Photo Credit: White Turf, St.Moritz©swiss-image/Andy Mettler



St. Moritz

Engadin, Switzerland.

Icy peaks glistening in the sun on winter mornings, exhilarating downhill runs and breathtaking Alpine panorama is what sends discerning skiers into raptures at St. Moritz. Ensnconed in the Engadin Valley in the Swiss Alps, St. Moritz offers experts a wide range of runs such as the Diavolezza area.

The intermediate runs and swooping slopes along the Morteratsch Glacier also make for a great mettle test. Beginners can take it easy and ski down the funiculars to Corviglia and thereon right into the heart of the town. The highpoint of St. Moritz, however, is its challenging nine-kilometre 'Königsabfahrt' (King Run) from the Corvatsch via Lake Hahnen to the St. Moritz ski area, or the longest floodlit night piste in Switzerland. St. Moritz is all set to host the Alpine World Ski Championships in 2017, reason enough to carve the pow before the champions get there.



Photo Credit: St. Moritz, Engadin©swiss-image.ch/Max Weiss

Avail yourself of the special 'Hotel Ski Pass' offer and enjoy fantastic skiing and snowboarding on 350 kilometres of superbly prepared pistes. Its claim to fame, apart from celebrating winter sports in elegance, is that this lovely winter sports resort has the world's only natural ice bob sleigh track.

Where: St. Moritz is located at 1,856 metres altitude in the Engadin Valley. The upper Engadin has the highest peaks in the eastern Alps, crowned by the only four thousand metre summit, the Piz Bernina, a key attraction. The Engadin Airport offers flight connections

to Zurich, Geneva, Basel, Milan and Munich. **Frames Tip:** It is one of three cities that has hosted the Winter Olympic Games twice. The White Turf St. Moritz, international horse races, takes place on the frozen Lake St. Moritz over the first three Sundays in February.

The event also includes harness races; you certainly don't want to give this a miss! The ski pass offer is valid until May 20. Book two nights or more at a participating hotel and buy a pass for just CHF 25 per person/day.

W: engadin.stmoritz.ch