

Ski Supreme

James Whitaker keeps up the standards



Goldener Berg

The Good Ski Guides snooty royal correspondent would rather sell the family silver than trade down to a three-star resort, which is why he opts to stay in the Arlberg.

When I go skiing, and this is for as long as I can remember, I go to resorts that are not only good on the piste but are well above average off it.

I am talking of the hotels, the mountain restaurants, the shopping, the general ambience...and so on. This includes how pretty, charming, Alpine... you name it...the place is.

That's why I love Klosters (where I learned to ski, however badly, while reporting on the Prince of Wales; Vail in the USA (Princess Diana); Verbier (Fergie, Duchess of York) St Moritz (where Le tout monde, well, the smart ones go) and Zermatt where I have frequently skied for my own pleasure.

But there is another ski area that is supreme. I refer to the Arlberg region of

Austria which encompasses St Christoph, St Anton, a charming hamlet called Zug; Zurs (somewhat purpose-built but bristling with five-star hotels) and the jewel in this region's crown, Lech.

I was right here earlier this year, after an all-too-long absence - in fact I hadn't been since the mid 1990s when Princess Diana took William and Harry to learn skiing - and I still can't think why I stayed away so long.

Lech and Oberlech has everything although I admit that to savour the best you need a thick wallet that can be regularly refilled. Cheap it ain't but where is these days with the value of the Pound against the Euro as it is?

However, before moving to the Hotel Goldener Berg I got one of the surprises of my privileged life. I ended up in the Arlberg Hospiz in St Christoph, just a few miles down the valley.

The hotel itself is warm, welcoming and cozy in a traditional Alpine manner.

The bedrooms are comfortable, the food is good, it's beautifully run by the charming Florian Werner while the apres-ski drawing room, complete



Arlberg Hospiz



Gasthof Post



Arlberg Hospiz



Goldener Berg

What the 620-year-old cellar contains are magnums (two bottles); Double Magnums; Jeroboams (six bottles for clarets, four for Burgundies); Methuselahs (eight bottles); even Nebuchadnezzars (20 bottles); and various other sizes (some containing 24 bottles), specially created by the French suppliers for Florian.

Extraordinary. There can not be another cellar anywhere to equal this one. If there is, lead me to it!

The collection of around 18,000 “bottles” is the cellar of the Brotherhood of St Christoph, the world’s oldest charitable fraternity. What does the Brotherhood, which includes various Kings, Queens and Princes, do? Lots of good for the less fortunate among us. People like me.

Later, I was moved up the valley to Lech, a place I got to know quite well in the years I was reporting on the Waleses. When Charles and Diana were still an item they would occasionally ski here in the 80s and, later, when they visited with their two young children.

The resort has all the requisites for a top-drawer skiing holiday. Pretty Austrian buildings, a meandering river

through the centre of town, and plenty of top-notch hotels.

The Gasthof Post is the first hotel I ever checked into in this village. It’s part of Relais & Chateaux (the best chain on earth) and looks as good today as I remember. It’s “home” to the Kings and Queens of Norway and Sweden when they are in ski mode.

Then there’s the Arlberg where Prince Charles and Princess Diana occupied the whole of the end wing of this fantastic hotel when they were in town. It’s still run by the charming Herr Schneider who, slightly surprisingly, greeted me like a long-lost friend (well, I did give his security a testing time in those faraway days).

Another that’s worth a stay is the Almhof Schneider (same family as the Arlberg) where I was plied with Champagne while sitting on their

balcony on one of those perfect sunny, skiing days. The Jordanian royal family always choose here as their bolt-hole when skiing. They’re not foolish nor, of course, short of lolly.

Meanwhile, I was at the Goldener Berg which is up the mountain and spectacularly looks right across Lech. Although the rooms are modern, not so much to my liking, the food here is terrific and has the finest views in the region. If you’re lucky you’ll get to ski with the owner, Daniela Pfefferkorn (once married to the aforesaid Florian). She represented Austria in the Downhill, so it helps if you’re brave.

All in all, the Arlberg region is the Tops when it comes to ski holidays. Luxury is normal here. The area has its own micro-climate which means, even in an “ordinary” season, there’ll always be enough of the white stuff. ■

Price Examples

Goldener Berg: 7 nights in a studio (incl Half-board and in early January) €3731, in a Suite (same period) €4123. In early February the prices are the same €3731 and €4123.

Arlberg Hospiz for 2009/10: 7 nights in a double studio (breakfast only and in early January) €2745, in the Arlberg suite (same period) €4410. In early February the respective prices are €2529 and €4086.

Gasthof Post for 2009/10: 7 nights in a Double room (incl Half-board and in early January) €4270, same price early February. A suite €6580 (in both early January and all of February).

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with a wonderful, huge open fire is the stuff of white-night dreams.

But... it was just across the road in the hotel’s “second” dining room area, a very old building, that I received the greatest opening of my eyes.

Florian (surely a name from a Jeffrey Archer novel?) unveiled his wine cellar to me. Now, I like my vino, particularly if it is fine claret or Burgundy. But I could never have anticipated what was on show in his beautifully, candle-lit cellar.

Bottles and bottles of First Growths, both Bordeaux and Sauternes, let alone the Bourgognes. But, and this is the point, they weren’t bottles as such. Florian can’t, it seems, be bothered with such ordinariness



Arlberg Hospiz



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