



## A WINTER'S TALE

by Louise Hoffman  
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hen you descend the aeroplane steps, inhale the crisp Alpine air eager to hit the slopes, you're not only embarking on a seasonal escape, you're taking part in a time-honoured tradition of winter sports holidays.

Because it was in St Moritz at the end of summer 1864, as legend has it, that the winter holiday was conceived. Four Englishmen were challenged by their host to return to the Swiss village for the winter months which, he claimed, were just as sunny. And so they were.

One hundred and fifty two years later, this exclusive resort continues to be revered as the world's best all-round winter sports destination. It boasts the last remaining natural bob run, the original Cresta skeleton course and 350km of pistes, as well as curling, skating, golf, cricket, polo and even show jumping held on its frozen lake. Twice a Winter Olympic Games host, St Moritz will also form the backdrop to the 44th FIS Alpine World Ski Championships in February 2017.

But, as the enterprising 19th-century hotel owner recognised, the key to St Moritz's popularity is its climate. Located at an altitude of 1,856m in the Engadin Valley, close to the Italian border, the village enjoys an attractive combination of reliable snowfall and 300 days of sunshine each year. Hardly a surprise, then, that for the past 86 years its logo has been a sun.

Similarly sunny, scenic and snow-laden is Verbier – the main resort in Switzerland's largest ski area, the 4 Vallées, just two hours away from Geneva airport by car.

With its dramatic terrain, high altitude (3,330m at the top of the ski area, with views of the Matterhorn), lift-served off-piste slopes and exhilarating spectator events such as Xtreme Verbier, the Verbier High Five and the Patrouille des Glaciers ski touring race, this area attracts the high-octane thrill-seekers. And the excitement doesn't end with the daylight hours, thanks to Verbier's vibrant social scene.

Meanwhile, the French Alpine destination of Courchevel – the largest and most elite of the five separate villages that make up the wider 3 Vallées resort of Courchevel – offers all of the luxuries that one might expect from such a prestigious location.

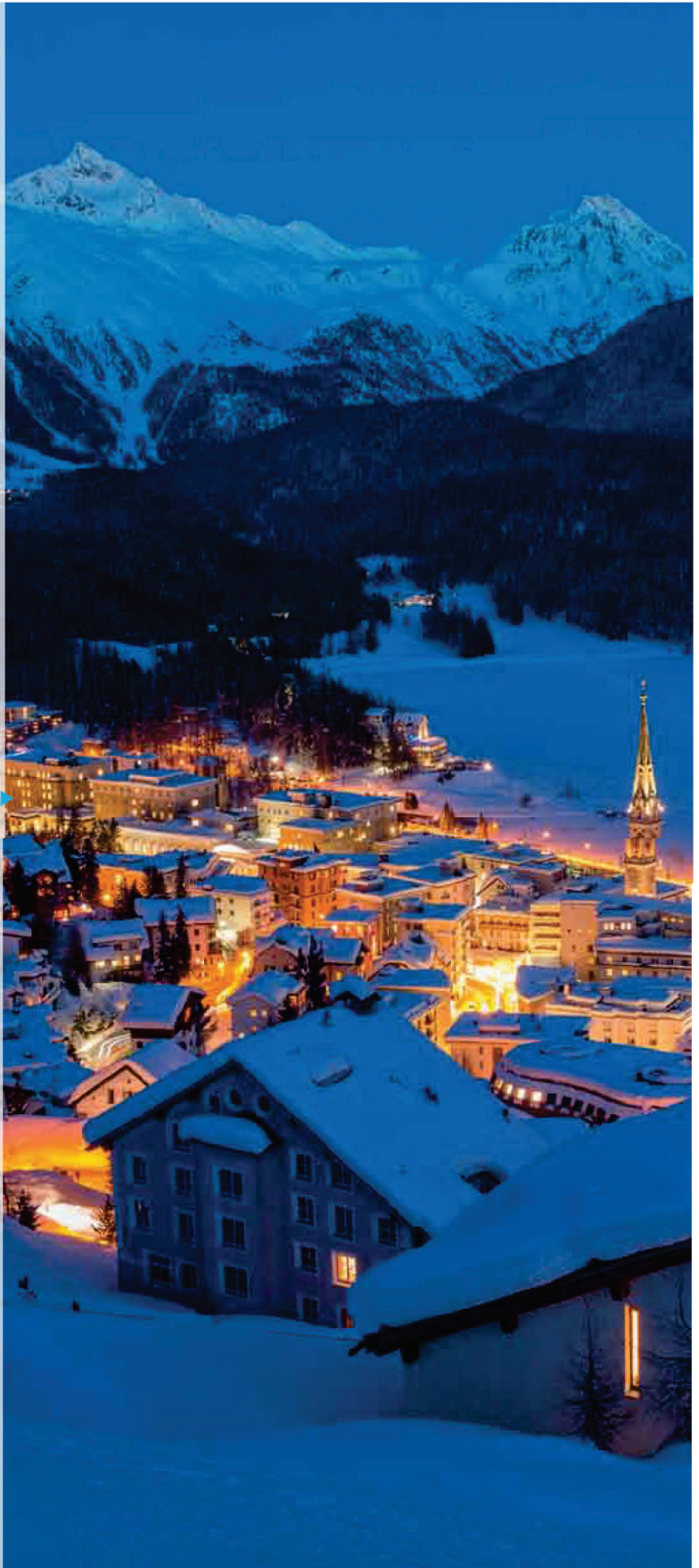
With designer boutiques, Michelin-starred restaurants and a selection of high-end hotels that is rivalled only by Paris, Courchevel also boasts its own airport, where privately owned jets and helicopters can deliver passengers direct to the slopes.

There are 150km of local runs to conquer, but the 3 Vallées region as a whole – the largest lift-linked ski area in the world – boasts 600km of pistes in total.

Equally renowned is the fashionable Swiss resort of Gstaad. The festive retreat of choice for countless celebrities from the 1960s to the present day, its population grows from 7,500 to 30,000 over a period of just nine days at Christmas time.

Gstaad's 220km of pistes tend to remain relatively quiet. However, the action can be found in the town's concert venues, nightclubs, art galleries and luxury boutiques; at its regular festivals; and in the bars or on the terraces of the chic restaurants and hotels.

So, which places and activities are the talk of the resorts for winter 2016/17?





Right: The Vito  
Schnabel Gallery  
in St. Moritz

## THE GALLERY

Currently one of the biggest names in the art world, Vito Schnabel opened his first permanent gallery space in St. Moritz last year. The Vito Schnabel Gallery hosts a range of progressive, contemporary exhibitions, with works by such artists as Jean-Michel Basquiat, Andy Warhol, Sterling Ruby and Vito's father, Julian Schnabel. *Vito Schnabel Gallery, Via Maistra 37, St. Moritz*  
Tel: +41 (0) 81 544 7620  
[vitoschnabel.com](http://vitoschnabel.com)  
[stmoritz@vitoschnabel.com](mailto:stmoritz@vitoschnabel.com)

## THE SHOP

Followers of French fashion should head straight to Blu&Berry when holidaying in Courchevel. It specialises in exclusive attire from leading designers such as Isabel Marant and Céline. Meanwhile, for luxury jewellery and watches (or for an emergency watch repair after an unfortunate spill on the slopes), try Julian Joailliers. *Blu&Berry, 2 rue du Rocher, Courchevel 1850*  
[bluandberry.com](http://bluandberry.com)  
*Julian Joailliers, Espace Diamant, Courchevel 1850*  
[bijouterie-julian.com](http://bijouterie-julian.com)

## THE SLOPE

When in Gstaad, freeriders should head to Glacier 3000 in nearby Les Diablerets, which offers guaranteed deep powder, 25km of runs and 10 installations, with an altitude range of 1,350m to 3,000m. At 7km long, the Olden run is the longest and most spectacular in the area, but there are plenty of other slopes to choose from, suited to a range of abilities. A local mountain guide is recommended for all routes.  
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