



Ice cool

From skiing to designer shopping, there's something for everyone in St. Moritz

THRILLS WITH FRILLS

Scratch the gold-plated surface of St. Moritz and discover a laid-back adventure tourism destination that rolls along at whatever pace you want it to

WORDS: Nicci Perides



I'm starting to believe that people who travel to St. Moritz are as much adrenaline-junkies as they are darlings of the old money world, but it's so easy to disguise it in the shroud of elegance and sophistication that surrounds the town.

I casually stroll over the famous frozen Lake St. Moritz, when Sara, my guide, stops me and points to a thick crack in the ice below. "Better hurry up, we don't want it breaking," she laughs.

Lake St. Moritz – 44 metres in depth – generally freezes in late December and thaws around April. Although you're not officially allowed to walk on it, locals say that as soon as you see the benches that are currently dotted around the frozen lake being taken away for the summer, you know it's time to walk around the lake rather than over it. However, there are no marshals or attendants telling you when it's safe. "Just step out and hope for the best; we don't even think about it now," Sara says, as I look on incredulously.

Life here is centred around the lake. In winter, tourism in St. Moritz depends on it freezing – and staying frozen – since it is the venue where the city holds events such as the St. Moritz Polo World Cup and the White Turf horse races. The lake also serves as the landing strip for the paragliders who throw themselves off Corviglia, one of the highest peaks near St. Moritz, attached only to a kite.

It's little wonder I should find St. Moritz to be a thrill-seekers paradise, considering one of the most dangerous winter sports was invented here: bobsleighbing.

Today the lake is under a thin layer of freezing fog and the temperature is an icy minus eight degrees. The lake is the central point of the town, where one can see a panorama of purest white mountains, alpine forest, and the picturesque village of St. Moritz.

The town's five luxurious five-star hotels sit proudly nestled in the landscape; Badrutt's Palace Hotel immediately pulls focus. The belle-epoque hotel was officially opened in 1896, and is rumoured to have given Alfred Hitchcock inspiration for his 1960s classic film *The Birds*.

To escape the morning temperatures of St. Moritz, we decide it's best to wait for the sun to emerge from behind the mountains before setting off, and indulge instead in a hot chocolate in Badrutt's. The hotel has an Old World charm; the inside is reminiscent of an old church, which is exactly what it used to be. Touring dignitaries would offer gifts, and remains of other churches (which were later incorporated into the architecture) were thought of as good luck.

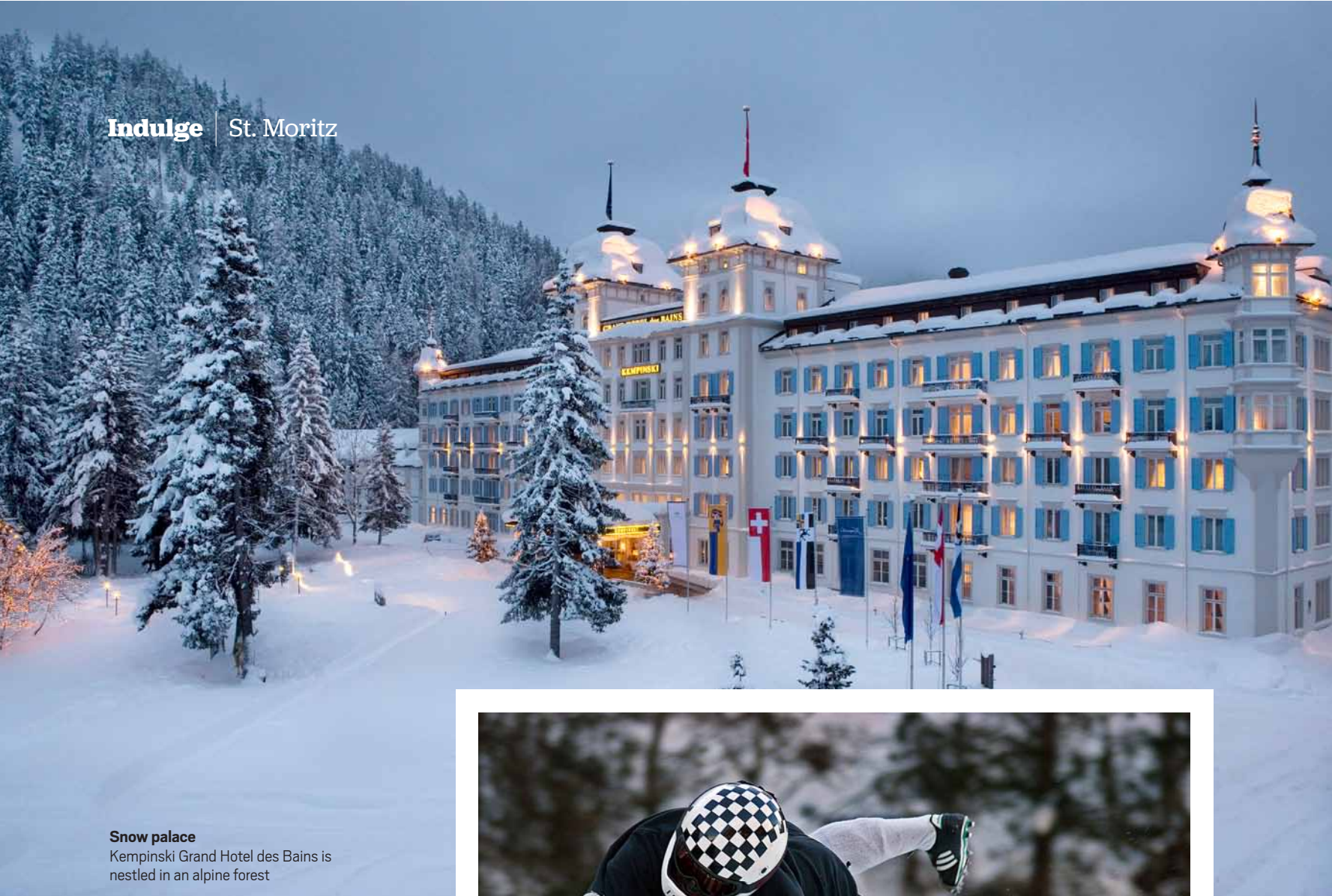
Hard-hitters

The town's lake is transformed into a polo pitch once a year



Powder chic

St. Moritz is home to some of the best-dressed snow-seekers on the planet



Snow palace

Kempinski Grand Hotel des Bains is nestled in an alpine forest

I sit down in the ‘Lounge of St. Moritz’ as the lounge at Badrutt’s is lovingly nicknamed, and look out over the lake below. The view is simply stunning. The lake glistens like a diamond encrusted in the frozen landscape, and the snow-capped mountains dominate the skyline.

To understand St. Moritz’ story, you need to understand that of Badrutt’s: “Badrutt’s invented winter tourism in the Alps,” says Eva Reinecke, public relations manager at the hotel.

‘Quite a claim,’ I think to myself as she continues: “The hotel’s first owner, Mr. Johannes Badrutt, wanted to prove that winter in St. Moritz was just as pretty – if not more so – than it is in the summer, so he proceeded to make a bet with his English guests. He challenged them to come and enjoy St. Moritz in the winter and if they didn’t have a good time, their entire stay would be complimentary.

“Well, the guests enjoyed their time so much that they stayed from December to April, and the winter season was born. The five gentleman guests were very well-connected members of the English aristocracy and their part of the deal was to rave about their time here to all their friends. They did, and St. Moritz became a winter destination almost overnight.”

St. Moritz, pre-Mr. Badrutt, was a summer hotspot where wealthy guests would come and enjoy the mineral water and make use of the destination as a spa. The mineral water is thought to possess a cleansing power to keep the body and mind young, and the city still boasts an impressive number of spas and health resorts that attract visitors in pursuit of wellness breaks or convalescence from around the world.



Adrenaline rush

Extreme sports are becoming as popular as skiing in St. Moritz

“The view is simply stunning. The lake glistens like a diamond encrusted in the frozen landscape, and the snow-capped mountains dominate the skyline”

As the years progressed and winter tourism became increasingly popular here, Johannes Badrutt’s predecessor, his son Casper, wasn’t happy resting on his father’s laurels.

He noticed that the latest craze of flying through the streets of St. Moritz on a sled was leading to too many pedestrian/sled collisions, so he took it upon himself to put an end to this and built the world’s first custom-made half-pipe bobsleigh run.

Today the run is used for many international competitions, including the Winter Olympics and the skeleton run (a race using a sled that has no breaks or steering). Tourists can also hurtle down one of the icy shoots accompanied by professionals if they choose to.

The death-defying 4.2-kilometre Cresta Run has a vertical drop of 700 metres that soars from the top of the Muottas Muragl, north of St. Moritz, back down into the valley.

“St. Moritz has a little something for everyone, whether you want to throw yourself down a mountain at 80mph, or you’d prefer to take a horse-drawn carriage at night into the woods”

This one is for pros only, but you can jump on the legendary 1.6-km Olympic run to get your icy high-speed kicks.

When the sun begins to peep over the mountains, it’s time to continue my tour of the village. It really is amazing that even though the snow is thick on the ground, the warmth from the sun, bringing it up to a bearable zero degrees, makes all the difference.

St. Moritz has a reputation as a playground for the rich and famous; the frivolities of the moneyed and beautiful often make headline news in magazines such as *OK!*. Eva from Badrutt’s explains that even though she works in the hotel, she usually only finds out which famous faces were in the village by reading the celebrity magazines.

Outside the hotel, the picturesque cobblestone street is lined with Louis Vuitton, Prada and a catalogue of other designer shops where typical St. Moritz visitors buy the latest seasonal designs without batting an eye at the price.

I pop into one and, out of curiosity, ask the attendant who has been her most famous customer. She merely smiles and indicates her lips are sealed.

The village has just over 5,000 inhabitants, but this swells to over 35,000 when ‘the season’ kicks off in the winter months. The town doesn’t feel crowded though, and I am assured that queuing for ski lifts isn’t the done thing in the Engadin Valley.

Some people would describe St. Moritz as a place that gives money a bad name, or as a show-off town, but to me, it is charming. Not Zermatt charming, but still breathtakingly beautiful, and it leaves me wanting more. I try to imagine the colours in the summer when the snow melts, the lake comes alive again and the trees awaken, and I can see this as a whole new summer experience.

St. Moritz has a little something for everyone, whether you want to throw yourself down a mountain at 80mph, or you’d prefer to take a horse-drawn carriage at night into the woods. It’s a place where anything goes – you dictate the pace and the village will keep up. Maybe that is why it’s one of the most luxurious holiday spots in Europe.



Grand dame
Badrutt’s Palace Hotel is where it all began in September 1864

Stay: Hotel Kempinski St. Moritz

Located in St. Moritz Bad, it is the only hotel in the village that offers its guests the chance to ski right into the property. The hotel is situated south of Lake St. Moritz and right at the source of the Mauritius spring. The luxurious 184-room hotel has a lot to offer, whether you’re skiing or just enjoying the scenery.

Best Restaurant: Lej de Staz

The only way to reach this secluded, traditional restaurant is via horse and cart. The romantic trip through the woods, passing howling wolves under moonlight wrapped in sheep skin, is a truly memorable experience, and the menu – prepared in-house and ordered for you – is exquisite; however be open-minded: we started with hay soup, yes, soup made from hay – it was delicious.

Best experience: paragliding over St. Moritz

Your adventure starts 2,486 metres above sea level. Strapped to a professional glider, a kite and a pair of skis, you launch yourself off the mountain and glide peacefully through the Upper Engadin Lake Plateau Valley, across the Alps, over St. Moritz village and land on the frozen Lake St. Moritz.



Picture perfect
Fog covers Lake St. Moritz in the early morning light