

OUT THERE *Haute cuisine*

Skiing and lunch go hand in glove. **ALISTAIR SCOTT** recommends the world's best mountain restaurants

Lunch is the pivotal point of the skiing day, a fixture around which all other plans revolve. Where to eat is as important a question as where to ski for the day. It is a time when skiers of vastly varying experience can come together to exchange tales of knee-deep powder, perfect pistes, a breakthrough at ski school or a spectacular wipe-out. Whether it's Glühwein by the fireside or rosé on a sunny terrace, a simple fondue or something more sophisticated, doesn't always matter. It is the sheer conviviality that makes ski lunches so special.

Hospiz Alm St Christoph, Austria

Atmospheric as they may be, Austrian mountain restaurants are not usually renowned for the quality of their food and wine. However, this large, wooden chalet-restaurant, built 20 years ago and belonging to the nearby Arlberg Hospiz (founded as a refuge in 1386), is an exception. Located between the fashionable resorts of Lech and St Anton, it is alluring both in sunshine, when the most coveted seats are on the upstairs balcony, and in a snowstorm, when you can warm up beside one of its roaring fires. The lunchtime menu is uncomplicated (roast chicken, baked potatoes with chilli) but the real attraction is the huge wine list, featuring many impeccable clarets and rare vintages. Go to the corner bar on the ground floor for service from Karl-Heinz, the finest and most eccentric barman in the Arlberg.

+43 (0)5446 2611; www.hospiz.com



Restaurant Zum See Zermatt, Switzerland

Located in a tiny hamlet on the lower slopes of the Klein Matterhorn sector, comprising a group of wooden

huts and its own chapel, this family business is undergoing a handover from Max Mennig and his wife to their son Markus and his girlfriend. It is truly astonishing to see such high-quality food appear so promptly from such a tiny kitchen. The lamb fillet with herbs and the sweetbreads in puff pastry are without equal. But the most sought-after items are the home-made patisseries. It is not a joke that skiers call ahead on their mobiles to reserve the *millefeuille*—you can see the "reserved" signs on top of the slices. Service is informal but gracious and there is a fine list of Swiss and Italian wines.

+41 (0)27 967 20 45; www.zumsee.ch

Hotel Jungfrau Wengernalp Wengen, Switzerland

"Surely the Wengernalp must be precisely the loveliest place in this world," wrote Leslie Stephen in 1871, and today the view remains utterly unchanged. No other restaurant has such a dramatic outlook as this view of the north face of the Eiger. (You can often see—and even hear—avalanches cascading down.) Book early for one of the sunny, wind-free tables against the wall. The veal sausage and the carrot cake are house specialities. Usefully for non-skiers, it is located by a station for the Jungfrau rack railway. There is also the option of taking the hair-raising toboggan run home.

+41(0)33 855 16 22; www.wengernalp.ch

Restaurant Fluhalp Zermatt, Switzerland

With its distinctive red shutters, Fluhalp is actually a real mountain hut where climbers stay overnight in late spring and summer. It has a remarkably remote setting on the Rothorn sector and is not accessible by any lift: all the wines have to be brought up by tractor during the autumn and the fresh produce is delivered by a piste machine or in the backpacks of the staff. But the remoteness does not mean any compromises in quality. The huge south-facing terrace with Matterhorn views can seat 400 and when the Murphy Brothers are playing live, this is the biggest high-altitude party in the Alps.

+41 (0)27 967 25 97; www.fluhalp.ch

La Marmite St Moritz, Switzerland

On a culinary level, La Marmite, situated at the top of the Corviglia funicular, may have a claim to be the best mountain eating place in the world. However, it has its disadvantages, notably the ugly concrete building in which it lies. Prices here are as steep as any black run, so those on a budget need not apply. But people with fat wallets or Swiss bank accounts and a taste for luxury foods will enjoy the caviar or truffle

Far from the madding piste
Restaurant Fluhalp is so remote, the wines arrive by tractor

menus. The melted brie with white truffles is just the thing after battling with moguls in sub-zero temperatures. There are plenty of vintage Champagnes and wines, but the Bellinis make a fine aperitif. The decor inside is much more pleasing, and the views of the Engadine valley are spectacular.

+ 41 (0)81 833 63 55; www.mathisfood.ch

Maison Vieille Courmayeur, Italy

Located at the top of the chairlift of the same name, this restaurant is also known as "Giacomo's", after the bearded Italian mountain man Giacomo Calosi who runs it with his Argentine wife, Luciana. It's at its best in spring, and though the terrace with its splendid views of Mont Blanc is pretty small, most diners just sit in deck chairs and tables placed on the snow-field in front of it. Giacomo has a great outdoor barbecue of Italian sausages and burgers, served to an appropriately loud background of party music. Both the antipasto and pasta selections are good and the Dolcetto d'Alba is probably the best wine for a sunny lunchtime. As you sink the bottles, so your chair sinks into the snow—that's the way it goes here and no one has ever complained.

+ 39 (0)165 809399; www.maisonvieille.com

