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Inviting Ischgl

We expect stellar skiing, we live for après. But who among us can resist a little ski-in, ski-out Rolex shopping?

by LESLIE WOIT

Photography by Stathis Bouroukas Courtesy of Elizabeth Arthotel

The origin story of this perfect day lies not in the snowbound heart of the Tyrol, but in the heat of the Nevada desert.

Cast your mind back to 1969, if you can. The swinging '60s are in full thrust and a louche Austrian named Günther Aloys finds himself loose on the Las Vegas Strip. Soaking it all in, surrounded by go-go dancers and velvet ropes, the air is heady with hedonism. Amid the neon excess, he sees not chaos, but inspiration. Not clutter, but art. Why, he wonders, can't the mountains be more like this?

Back then, his tiny Tirolean home village of Ischgl was postcard-pretty to be sure. But sexy enough for the new skiing jet-set? Probably not. Günther, ever the visionary, imagined something more. So, while he couldn't bring the mountains to Vegas, he vowed to bring a little Vegas to the mountains.

Fast forward to today's Ischgl — home to one of the slickest lift networks in the Alps and certainly its most iconic après ski. Aloys's original Hotel Elizabeth turns 50 this year — all mirrored elegance and artful glamour, now a five-star fantasia helmed by his daughter Mirjam Aloys together with her dynamo husband Markus Pfister. Another of *Vater* Günther's many brainchildren, the biannual Top of the Mountain Concerts,

helped seal the town's reputation as the Alps' definitive après-ski amphitheatre since 1995. Sting. Tina. Kylie. Rod... For the inaugural show, Sir Elton himself was airlifted — white Steinway and all — onto a snow-swept summit stage. The clouds parted, the ivories tinkled and, just like that, Ischgl wasn't just skiing — it was pop spectacle.

Directly opposite The Elizabeth — now named Elizabeth Arthotel in appreciation of its gallery-worthy collection of more than 130 artworks from leading artists from Austria and beyond — a creamy ride on the sleek 24-person Silvrettbahn gives lift off. Ischgl's 150 miles of snow-primed pistes are laced with a further 45 high-speed lifts (heated, bubbled, and smooth as a whisper) and more than 1,000 snow cannons. It's a white carpet ride, mostly above treeline, as we launch from Idalp plateau toward the ridge that marks the Austria-Switzerland border. At the summit, every day skiers in their hundreds strike theatrical poses in front of the mammoth Ischgl sign. Showmanship runs in the region's blood: once, the flamboyant Günther dumped 300 kilos of ruby-colored minerals into the Inn River to hype a Simply Red concert. Gloriously, he was fined 100,000 schillings.

From here, we descend in style: a seven-mile glide to



Elizabeth Arthotel



Zsigmond Lucza, exhibited at Elizabeth Arthotel



Elizabeth Arthotel Lounge



Schatzi

Samnaun, the tiny Swiss hamlet that was once a waypoint for smugglers of sugar and butter. Now, population 755, the town is an Aladdin's cave of watches, perfumes, cigars and booze. Much of it seriously swanky, all is tax-free.

Behind the understated "Zegg: Watches and Jewellery" sign (and past two burly security dudes) is a trove of exquisite baubles and bezels — Rolex, Chopard, Breitling and more occupy four floors of polished glass, with an elevator for tired ski legs. Linger at the Champagne bar with *les patrons*, Olivier and Monique Zegg — old friends of the Aloys Family — and try on a few trinkets for size. Then pop over the street to their sister boutique, a custom *parfumerie* where the air is sensual, and at the back a cigar fumoir hums with perfect 69 percent humidity. Finally, the crispy rösti at Chasa Montana takes an extra 20 minutes to prepare — and that's the point. In Samnaun, they'll sell you the watch, and you'll enjoy every second of it.

Considerably poorer but feeling richer — telling perfect time, smelling wonderful, blood-to-champagne ratio still to the good — we've skied back into Austria and Ischgl, in time for après at Schatzi's. Built into the base of Elizabeth Arthotel, this indoor-outdoor party is classic Ischgl. Inside, the cathedral of beer and

flashing lights is packed with dancing bodies and a dozen lithe Eastern European performers whose mini-dirndls twirl and flirt to the beat. Raising a flute as a 20-euro note gets tucked into the dancer's cleavage, Herr Günther observes the sybaritic scene with the eye of a connoisseur: "This is art, too." As a man-about-town visionary who's had the likes of Paris Hilton and Tamara Ecclestone on his arm, he should know.

The partying in this corner of the Silvretta is legendary, yet these days, for all its glitz, Ischgl is maturing. Fewer Jägerbombs, more smoked Negronis. Fewer wursts, more wagyu. While the giant nightclubs of the past have slipped off the menu, Schatzi's still goes off — just not past 8pm.

So before the stars come out, we pad in soft robes upward to the Elizabeth's glass-walled penthouse swimming pool — in time to watch skiers negotiate their last run of the day. An internationally renowned spectacle, the last turns down the somewhat-steep home-run piste is a highly entertaining goat rodeo of tired legs and flatlanders whose antics are cheered on enthusiastically by the Schatzi crowd — or, more salubriously, from the warmth of the infinity pool.

In the swing of it now, there's time to succumb to a soothing



Sun Downer Ischgl 2024 ©TVB Paznaun – Ischgl



Skiing in Ischgl ©TVB Paznaun – Ischgl



“It’s better to be notorious than boring.”



Alexander Höller, exhibited at Elizabeth Arthotel



Eliza Restaurant

Thai massage before an excellent dinner by Chef Thomas Zechner. The schnitzel is light as a sigh and a six-course tasting menu is well-supported by a 7,000-bottle wine cellar and attentive sommelier. A fine place to push the boat out, indeed: according to Günther, this is the wealthiest town per capita in Austria – and with more Gault & Millau toques than anywhere outside Vienna, it’s a claim that tastes true. (Also *vaut le detour* is Mad Sushi at Hotel Madlein, representing another arm of the Aloys’ family dynasty, the elegant Madeleine.) Later, beneath the

flatteringly low lights of the bar, a charming bartender takes little encouraging to launch into an impressive Tom-Cruise-flavored cocktail-shaker stage show. Cue the applause and another round, *bitte schön*.

From Elton to Alanis, smugglers to sommeliers, Ischgl is still the place to ski hard as you please, wear your good stuff, and always – always – make time for more Champagne. Günther said it best: “It’s better to be notorious than boring.” 