



opportunities are limitless with a guide; more so if you hike up on skins for an hour – the north-facing Schwarztor is a classic.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

You could occupy yourself for a week in Zermatt without skiing at all. On the mountain, there are 45 miles of winter walking tracks, a sledging run from Roten Boden to Riffelberg and an ice palace in the glacier beneath the Klein Matterhorn. The “Go-Ape”-style forest park, with a 700ft zipwire, is open this winter

for the first time. There’s a free village tour daily at 6pm from the Monte Rosa hotel and a new Pistenbully ride-and-drive experience.

THE BEST CHALETS

There are some stylish properties, self-catering and catered, in Zermatt, but if you’re on a budget, it pays to shop around: it’s perfectly possible to pay £650 a week – and during the school holidays at that – for a central apartment for four, booked through the tourist office website (zermatt.ch). For family packages, tour

operator prices are cheapest in the Easter holidays.

Ski Total (01483 791933; skitotal.com). Has 16 chalets, from a converted farmhouse to a development in the Petit Village, beyond Sunnegga. Seven nights from £519 per person, including return flight and transfers. **Supertravel** (020 7962 9933; supertravel.co.uk). Has six properties, from a newly fitted development in Winkelmaten to Z’Gogwärggi, a petite converted sheep shed. From £809 per person for a week at Chalet Furi, including return flight and transfers.

Mountain Exposure (0845 425 2001; mountainexposure.com). This company is Zermatt’s chalet king, with 25 properties, from the spectacular Heinz Julien loft to the Belinda, a cosy self-catering chalet in Winkelmaten. From £101 per room per night, going seriously upwards. **Summit Retreats** (020 8870 3339; summitretreats.com). This new company has 24 properties in the resort. The smartest is Chalet Zermatt Peak, where the average weekly cost is £5,750 per person per week.

THE BEST HOTELS

Zermatt’s 126 hotels, most of which are family-run, encompass everything from the Omnia, a minimalist monument, to an apartment-hotel owned by the downhill star Pirmin Zurbriggen and the backpacker-style Matterhorn Hostel. Look out for offers from Inghams and Crystal: discounting goes on even in February. **Hotel Alphubel** (967 3003; zermatt.net/alphubel; double b & b from SF148/£100 per night). Hard to beat for modest, quiet, central value.

Hotel Walliserhof (966 6555; walliserhof-zermatt.ch; from SF260/£175). Friendly, fresh and unmistakably Swiss, with outstanding food.

Cervo (968 1212; cervo.ch; doubles from SF320/£215). A gorgeous deer-themed boutique hotel a few minutes from the Sunnegga funicular. Five five-room chalets, each with a sauna, steam room and outdoor hot tub.

Backstage Hotel & Vernissage (966 6970; backstagehotel.ch; doubles from SF210/£140). Built and run by Zermatt’s star designer, Heinz Julien. As a treat it’s worth paying almost double for a dazzling “cube loft”.

THE BEST RESORT RESTAURANTS

The town has 111 restaurants, from **Take It Doner** (large kebab SF10/£7) to the family-friendly **Swiss Chalet** (cheese fondue SF24/£16) and **Myoko**, a swish Japanese (the sky’s the limit). For a special occasion, I like the grill restaurants at the hotels **Alex** (966 7070) and **Walliserhof** (as above) or **Chez Max Julien** at the Beau Rivage (967 4044). The delicious three-course set menu at **The Schwyzer Stubli** (966 0000) is a steal at SF27/£18, and there’s a Swiss band daily from 5pm. **Restaurant du Pont** (967 4343), an unpretentious place at the top of the main street, has tasty roesti and viande séchée.

THE BEST MOUNTAIN RESTAURANTS

Zermatt has 56 mountain restaurants, many of which are reachable on foot, as well as skis. I’d arrive for lunch before midday, when they are quietest. Good family bets are the self-service places at Sunnegga, Riffelberg and Trockener Steg. But it’s a shame not to try the places

WHAT TO AVOID

- The smart pharmacies: Muller, a chemist near the station, is far cheaper. For supplies, use the Co-op or Migros.
- Using the lavatories on the Cervinia side (some are draughty squat affairs).
- Forgetting your euros on a trip to Italy – paying in francs will negate the cheaper prices.
- Don’t miss the last lift home – it’s a day trip back by road.

with table service, too. Top of many a list is **Chez Vrony** (967 2552) at Findeln, though just as appealing are **Aroleid** (967 2658) – rustic and amiable – and **Vis-a-Vis** (966 6400), on the Gornergrat, with an original menu and unmissable view (sometimes with ibex, as well as mountains and glaciers). **Fluhalp** (no phone). An irresistible warren of rooms, lovely terrace and live music. **Bontadini** (0039 0166 948410), in Italy. Has a smarter downstairs, with a gamey menu of Aosta Valley specialities, plus a great little self-service.

BEST FOR APRES-SKI

Snowboat Caffè (967 4333). Designed like a boat with a sundeck. Try the Matterhorn Mule. **Hotel Post** (967 1931). Has an array of busy bars and clubs – the least obvious and nicest of which is the Papa Caesar Lounge on the first floor, which has changing art displays and a balcony. **Vernissage** (966 6970). The stylish and relaxed bar at Backstage Hotel (see The Best Hotels); popular with locals and visitors.

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