



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT:** Ballooning over Obersimmental, another Alps pastime; Fatbiking, a trending snow sport in Switzerland (*photos courtesy Gstaad Saanenland Tourismus*); Gstaad Palace and the surrounding village, blanketed by fresh powder, emit an ethereal glow by evening fall (*photo courtesy Gstaad Palace*). **OPPOSITE:** Skiing snow-capped peaks becomes child's play after a few runs with an instructor (*photo courtesy Gstaad Palace*).

# SWISS BLISS

Elevate your skills on the slopes while lodging in one of Gstaad's most sumptuous hotels.

by KRISTY ALPERT

**W**HEN I TURNED THE CORNER, I MADE IT JUST IN TIME TO CATCH THE LAST GOLDEN CURVE of the sun dipping behind the snow-capped peaks of the Swiss Alps. I reminded myself to inhale again, as the sight had quite

literally taken my breath away. While I regained my composure, I felt a slight breeze as my ski instructor whizzed past me.

Up until that point, my instructor had made it a point to ski behind me to better observe my form, offering valuable tips and advice while we paused slope side, chatted over our light lunch and microbrewed

beers at Saanewald Lodge Restaurant ([saanewald-lodge.ch](http://saanewald-lodge.ch)), or sat on the chairlift heading back to the top of the mountain.

Even with my newly acquired ski confidence and improved form, I knew better than to let that woman out of my sight. In just one short day, she had become my guide, my inspiration, my teacher and my





Inside a sumptuous Tower Suite, which boasts three balconies overlooking the mountains, two bedrooms, en suite bathrooms, a walk-in dressing room, living room and dining space. **OPPOSITE, FROM TOP:** Palace Spa's al fresco heated Jacuzzi exhibits the masterfully thoughtful design woven into the hotel's architecture; Le Grill, Rôtisserie restaurant fuses international fare with fine wines from the chateau cellar (photos courtesy Gstaad Palace).

friend. I knew that where she skied, I could ski. And I knew that if she were in a hurry to get somewhere, I had better bend my knees, tuck my elbows in and follow her to whatever powdery pasture she had in sight.

I caught up to her just as she began slowing down at the base of the mountain. In the distance, I almost could make out the outline of a flower-adorned cocktail table. I smiled at the thought of which lucky honeymooners or vacationing diplomats would have the good fortune to stand around the table to enjoy their après-ski on the slopes. And it was then my instructor motioned me to a stop, took off her skis, poured two glasses of gluhwein, and then welcomed me over to our "ski butler" table of freshly made charcuterie and local cheeses to "Proscht" to a great day of skiing.

#### UNLIKE ANY OTHER

Although I didn't grow up near mountains, I've been a skier all my life, carving out my skills on short-term family vacations to Vail, Deer Valley and Park City. Over the years, I'd become an intermediate skier at best, never shuddering at the sight of fresh powder or brief moguls, and gaining a sense of pride about my ability to regain control after "catching an edge." I was comfortable on skis and I enjoyed ski vacations, but it wasn't until I booked the Ski Pleasure package at Gstaad Palace that I could say I truly began to love skiing.

Taking a private ski or snowboarding lesson is without a doubt the best way to improve your skills on the slopes, and taking a lesson in the gorgeous surroundings of one of the most picturesque Alpine villages in the world is one sure way to guarantee you'll never forget your experience.

Gstaad is nestled in the German-speaking region of the Bernese Oberland in Switzerland, and is home to one of the largest ski areas in the Alps (137 miles of slopes). Although many visitors come to Gstaad during the warmer months to meander through the pedestrian-only streets and shop the



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EXPERIENCE ■ IMMERSION

Gildo's Ristorante serves authentic Italian fare prepared by Venetian chefs in a homey, Alpine lodge setting (photo courtesy Gstaad Palace).

designer labels along the promenade (Cartier, Hermès, Prada, etc.), the principal appeal once things cool down in the region lies on piste. While other resorts across Europe become inundated with tourists at the drop of the first snowflake, the sumptuous slopes surrounding Gstaad have managed to remain mostly uncluttered, making it the perfect place to hone your skills on wide-open runs on a variety of terrains that range from bunny slopes to off piste.

The package at Gstaad Palace comes with a two-day ski pass (or more), one full day with a private ski instructor and three nights of luxurious living and dining at majestic Gstaad Palace with unlimited access to the Palace Spa. Although there are numerous ski schools to choose from in the Gstaad area, Gstaad Palace is the only place that offers such a bespoke experience, complete with ski butler service (i.e., bringing your skis/snowboards and equipment

to the mountain, taking all the equipment back for you, and meeting you at the end of the day for on-slope après and snacks).

As the favorite ski destination for numerous celebrities and dignitaries, the resort vets its ski instructors against the best and only offers an exclusive list of the top trainers around. One of the most popular instructors is Bethli Küng (privatskilehrergstaad.ch), the former mayoress of Saanen and an instructor with decades of experience teaching the famous (the former King of Greece, the Bulgari family, etc.) and lesser-known guests of the mountain how to perfect their form. Kung was once a member of the A-squad of the Swiss National team, and now spends her time offering lessons that range from beginner to expert (off piste).

**OTHER WINTER FUN**

Enjoying the mountain doesn't necessarily mean speeding down on skis or on a

snowboard. There are so many options to play in the powder in and around the Gstaad area. Gstaad Palace regularly organizes private lessons and private experiences with any winter sport imaginable, from sledding and heli-skiing with an instructor, to snowshoeing excursions and cross-country skiing, to romantic hot air balloon rides over the snow-capped peaks. All tours and lessons are led by knowledgeable instructors, who add to the experience by allowing guests the freedom to enjoy the sport and return with a day's worth of memories and the best souvenir of all—a new set of skills. ■

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### OUT OF SEASON INSTRUCTION

Can't make it for the ski season this year? That doesn't mean you have to miss out on experiencing the Bernese Alps. Take ski instructor Bethli Küng's

advice and book Walig Hut, an 18th-century converted cattle barn that has been recognized as the world's most expensive shed. This luxury hut is only

open from June through September and offers guests a remotely bespoke experience in the hills above Gstaad. —K.A.