

WISH YOU WERE HERE



## The white stuff

Ski novice **Laura Millar** finds guaranteed snow and Michelin-starred meals at a stylish Swiss resort in the heart of Graubünden

If there's anywhere better to experience what savvy winter holidaymakers have known for decades – the unparalleled joy of trying to, well, keep one's skis parallel – I'd like to know about it. I've headed to Arosa, possibly one of Switzerland's best-kept secrets, to learn how to whizz down a mountain on two narrow bits of metal and fibreglass, and as terrifying as that sounds to me, if you have to start anywhere, this is the place. A tiny hamlet with an out-of-season population of around 3,000, Arosa sits in the heart of a valley in the canton of Graubünden, surrounded by looming, jagged mountains. Getting there involves flying to Zurich, travelling south by train to the town of Chur, then taking a dinky little bright red locomotive which chugs you up, higher and higher, passing trickling streams, snow-topped

chalets, and even the odd gambolling deer on your way up to nearly 1,800m.

Just beyond the peaks are a couple of flashier resorts, including Davos-Klosters, but this is not the place to come to show off your bling, your furry boots or designer salopettes; it's got a more low-key, relaxed, family vibe. The village itself is scattered with a few skiwear and hire shops, several restaurants, and, at the bottom of the slopes, a ski and snowboard school. Over the past few years it's had consistently good snowfall – 30cm fell the day before I arrived – with December to March fairly safe bets. When you do get here, you can choose from over 225km of slopes, and 181 runs, for

*You won't be intimidated by hordes of people confidently zipping past you*



The snow covered Weissshorn, Arosa, main; the view from the Tschuggen Grand Hotel, above

all levels, as Arosa is connected to neighbouring resort, Lenzerheide, by the Urdenbahn, Switzerland's fastest cable car. You essentially get double the value for one trip – no wonder it tends to attract serious, dedicated skiers.

Arosa may be modest compared to more high-profile, celebrity-thronged resorts, but it has had famous visitors in the past; in 2013, a certain Kate Middleton, then five months pregnant with George, came with Prince William for a friend's wedding. Handily, the friend's grandfather happened to own the hotel they stayed at, the Tschuggen

Grand, which is also, happily, where I'm spending the next couple of days. Named after the mountain it abuts, the building doesn't immediately scream "alpine". In fact, it's a rather modern-looking, multi-storey block, which was built in the 1960s after the original structure unfortunately burned down. However, it couldn't be more perfectly situated for the slopes; it has its own little funicular mountain railway, the Tschuggen Express, with two cabins which can sweep 12 people at a time up a further 155m to the start of some of the runs.

Even better for skiers, the Tschuggen has its own equipment-rental store right on site, where you can be fitted for boots and skis, then store them in the adjoining stone-tiled locker room until you're ready for action. And action aplenty there is, with abundant blue and red runs on the Hornli and Urdenfürggli mountains (and a few black ones for the daredevils). The advantage of this not being an overly oversubscribed resort is that if you're a complete beginner, like me, you won't be too intimidated – or terrified – by hordes of people constantly, and confidently,

zipping past you. The instructors at the local ski school are incredibly patient and calm, meaning that by the end of nearly three hours, even I have completed a couple of blue runs without falling over.

The reward, surely, is the food. Although I couldn't ski directly to it myself (though that's the easiest way to reach it, down piste number two), lunch is spent at the fun and friendly Alpenblick restaurant, whose interiors will fulfil all your cosy log cabin dreams – think wooden benches, warm woollen blankets, and bunches of dried Alpine flowers dangling from the ceiling. Tables groan under pots of bubbling cheese fondue (made to a closely-guarded recipe), vast boards of thinly-sliced hams and salamis, dishes of plump, glossy local sausages, miniature boiled potatoes for dipping, and bowls of insanely-scented truffled fries. Owned by a Zurich-based restaurateur, it's one of six different branches, and is endlessly popular, not least due to the stunning views from the windows and its outdoor terrace.

Back at the Tschuggen, there are four restaurants to choose from. The Grand offers more formal dining by night, and a huge buffet breakfast by day. Stock up on poached eggs, Swiss cheese, and charcuterie to fuel you for the day ahead. My favourite, however, is the laid-back Basement (fitted with its own, miniature, *Big Lebowski*-style bowling alley), serving casual-sounding food – burgers, steaks and salads – prepared with high quality ingredients. The crispy rosti burger with porcini mushrooms in a soft pretzel burger is a highlight, but do *not* miss the addictive cheesecake, made with the creamiest milk from Arosa cows, and best chased down with a shot of the local firewater, Iva schnapps. And if you're feeling fancy, book a table at La Vetta, the one Michelin-starred dining room overseen by head chef Leopold Ott. Innovative culinary creations could take the form of Chianina beef served with popcorn, mole, and white bean mousse, or perch with black pudding and apple jelly; either way, it's an experience to remember.

There's no significant nightlife

in Arosa (though après-skiers congregate at the Tschuggen Hutte, halfway down piste 14) but that's no hardship when your room is such a treat to come back to. The hotel's interior décor, by flamboyant Swiss-Italian architect and designer Carlo Rampazzi, is an interesting blend of 80s maximalism and Swiss tradition. The lobby features customised, contemporary furniture, with walls upholstered in Hermes leather, and modern artwork here and there. But the bedrooms feel more intimate; the Double Deluxe category all have a balcony overlooking the mountains, leather Chesterfield-style furniture, a huge bed with a snug blanket embroidered with edelweiss, and marble bathroom with his and hers sinks and a fantastically vigorous power shower, perfect for attacking sore muscles.

Even better is booking into the 5,000m2 Bergoase Spa, a futuristic-looking, four-storey construction topped with glass "sails" which seem to poke out of the ground (and which light up at night to make them even more Instagrammable). A hydro-massage pool, a selection of sauna and steam rooms, and a wide choice of different therapies mean that by the next morning, those aches and pains will be gone. Especially if that means getting up early; one of the most breathtaking things to do while you're here is sunrise skiing. You'll take the cable car up to the Weisshorn, at a dizzying 2,600m, just before dawn, and observe the increasingly pink-tinged sky, the rising sun glancing off the bright, white, snow-covered peaks – it's utterly magical. Next time, though, I'll make sure I can get right back down to the bottom on skis. ■

**Three nights at Tschuggen Grand Hotel, Arosa costs from £1,348 per person with the Oxford Ski Company (tel: 01993 899 420, [oxfordski.com](http://oxfordski.com)), based on two sharing a standard double room on a B&B basis, including flights from Edinburgh to Zurich and private transfers. For further details on the hotel please visit [www.tschuggen.ch/en](http://www.tschuggen.ch/en) Private skiing lessons from 150CHF/£118 for 1hr 50, [skischule-arosa.ch](http://skischule-arosa.ch)**



The glass sails of the Bergoase Spa

STAYCATION



Lounging at Loch Lomond

Gaby Soutar enjoys a life of luxury complete with underfloor heating at a refurbished former grain mill

It's strange how watching other people exercise seems to increase one's own relaxation levels.

I think this, as I sip tea, eat shortbread, and watch a pair of weary walkers in bright techy anoraks and heavy-looking rucksacks trudge past the bottom of our garden, distantly framed between trees and silhouetted against the silvery eastern shore of Loch Lomond.

They peer up at our lovely wee stone house. One of them pulls out their phone, to take a snap, perhaps as an aide memoire so they can book a night here the next time they tackle the West Highland Way.

They're probably staying in a tent tonight. They'll be cold and will have to eat beans. Suckers.

In contrast, we'll be bedding down at Little Eden, a property from Unique Home Stays – a compilation of places where "exceptional living spaces and breathtaking settings combine".

Formerly a grain mill, this 19th century stone building has been restored and refurbished, with an interior that's more like a five star hotel than your average holiday cottage. As well as loads of kitchen mod cons, a Sonos sound system, and a huge telly, there's underfloor heating.

I bet those walkers would like that, once they'd unlaced their hiking boots

and discarded their sweaty socks. They'd probably also benefit from the huge array of midgie fighting paraphernalia that's been provided. The owners have supplied the ultimate artillery – citronella candles, Smidge, Skin So Soft, Repel and loads of other sprays, everything but a bazooka and flame thrower. However, we don't need to deploy anything, as we don't see a single midge.

That's not only because we spend most of our time indoors, working our way through the contents of the welcome basket, which contains Loch Lomond Roastery coffee, eggs, honey, jam, wine and other goodies. The open plan downstairs space is dressed like something you might see on Pinterest.

Along with a fat sofa and a wood burning stove, there's a wooden kitchen table to seat about eight, prints of ferns, pigeon grey decor, a chandelier made of antlers, and idiosyncratic ornaments, such as china artichokes, porridge spoons, and lots of vintage books, including *British Birds* (engraved with "Sheila, with love from granny, 1950").

Down a couple of stairs, there's a bathroom with clawfoot bath, swanky shower and other cute props, like old pharmacy bottles.

Up the wooden staircase, you'll find

two peaceful and warm bedrooms nestling under the eaves, one with twin beds and the other a king size.

This house features some lovely outdoor space too.

As a city dweller, who's used to walled in tenement back greens, it's kind of charming to have an enclosed garden amongst acres of woodland, like a little patch of civilisation. It includes a swing that's hung from an elderly looking tree, so I could do my impression of the woman in the famous Fragonard painting, but without losing my (not pink, nor satin) shoe.

Out here, you can also chuck a couple of logs on their fire pit, wrap

*We kept zigzagging off the beaten path to look at pretty views at the shoreline*

blankets round your shoulders and watch the sparks drifting upwards on the breeze,

Their pond is complete with lily pads (but no frogs to be seen) and, of course, the little river, once a source of power for the mill, runs past the house. We paddled in this, to cool (nay, cryogenically freeze) our feet, after tackling a portion of the West Highland Way path, from the bottom of the garden to Rowardennan, where you'll find the lodge that serves lunch (think scampi and fries).

**Clockwise from main: the living room and exterior of Little Eden; Loch Lomond**

The round trip was probably only three or four miles, a fraction of the 96 mile route from Milngavie to Fort William, but it is very undulating and we kept zigzagging off the beaten path to look at pretty views at the shoreline. Every 20 minutes or so, we'd see a walker, who'd say ciao, bonjour, or just give a tired wave.

For a longer walk, you could take the path from the cottage in the other direction, for the Balmaha, where, among other things, you'll find the Oak Tree Inn and St Mocha coffee shop, both watched over by the four-year-old statue of the late broadcaster, author and climber Tom Weir.

You can also catch the ferry here, over to the pretty village of Luss, where you'll find Luss General Store and the Loch Lomond Arms, amongst other attractions.

Or, it's just a short taxi ride from Luss to Cameron House Hotel & Spa, where you can get a decent massage.

Not that I required any additional relaxation. I had got all I needed by watching those poor walkers trudge past, while I was holed up in the cosiest cottage in Loch Lomond. ■

**Little Eden, Loch Lomond, sleeps up to four guests at £1,550 a week. For more information, call 01637 881183 or see [www.uniquehomestays.com](http://www.uniquehomestays.com)**

48 HOURS IN

Kirkwall

**Friday, midday**

Check into the Foveran (doubles from £125, [www.thefoveran.com](http://www.thefoveran.com)), a cosy restaurant with eight rooms overlooking the natural harbour of Scapa Flow, with its epic war history.

**1pm**

Head into town for lunch at Judith Glue Real Food Café and Restaurant ([www.judithglue.com](http://www.judithglue.com)), where Orkney Gold beef and local hand-dived scallops tempt. Don't miss the arts and craft shop on site, which has been here long before the cruise ships brought a raft of options.

**3pm**

The grandstand tourist attraction is vast St Magnus Cathedral. Delve in to a world alive with Viking ghosts.

**4pm**

Slip next door to the Bishop's and Earl's Palaces and learn about the controversial Scots earls who were once besieged within the walls. Climb the tower for a view over Kirkwall.

**6pm**

Taste one of the award winning gins at the brand new bar at the slick Orkney Distillery ([www.orkneydistilling.com](http://www.orkneydistilling.com)).

**8pm**

Dine at the lively Helgi's pub ([www.helgis.co.uk](http://www.helgis.co.uk)) and savour their shellfish mash laced with Orkney scallops, king prawns and mussels.

**Saturday, 9.15am**

Take a guided tour of the remarkable Ness of Brodgar Neolithic site (<https://orkneyheritagetours.co.uk>), where new treasures are regularly

BARGAIN BREAKS

Malaysian moments

Save up to £720 per couple on a trip to Malaysia as Netflights.com is offering seven nights (two nights are free) at the five star St Regis Langkawi hotel on a bed and breakfast basis. Starting from £1,369pp, it includes flights from Glasgow. Book by 16 December for selected dates in March 2019.

**[www.netflights.com](http://www.netflights.com)**

Gone to the dogs

The four star Macdonald Aviemore Resort has teamed up with the Cairngorm Sleddog Centre to offer a two-night stay in the resort along with a sled dog ride through the surrounding Cairngorms National Park. From £250pp, the package



unearthed. Or travel here yourself and take in the Ring of Brodgar and Stones of Stenness too.

**Midday**

Enjoy a quick sandwich (with Orkney Cheddar, of course) en route to the world famous Highland Park distillery ([www.highlandparkwhisky.com](http://www.highlandparkwhisky.com)), where their Viking Experience lets you tour then purchase an exclusive single cask bottling.

**2pm**

Move on to the lesser-known Scapa distillery (<http://scapawhisky.com>), where a sweet and gentler malt awaits.

**7pm**

Ease back for dinner at the Foveran for a variety of locally caught seafood, with head chef Paul Doull at the helm.

**Sunday, 9am**

Take a walk along the shores of Scapa Flow thinking of the sailors who died here in both World Wars. ■

**Robin McKelvie**

**Northlink Ferries ([www.northlinkferries.co.uk](http://www.northlinkferries.co.uk)) connect Aberdeen, Scrabster and Shetland with Orkney. More information - [www.visitscotland.com](http://www.visitscotland.com)**