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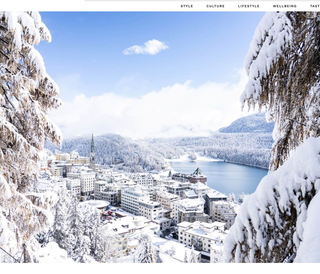


INTERNATIONAL

Discovering the magic of St Moritz as a first-time skier

28 Feb 2025 | | By Karl Grimaras

NEW TO LIFE ON EXIST KARL GRIMARAS CHECKS INTO HOTEL GIARDINO MOUNTAIN TO DISCOVER THE MAGIC OF ST MORITZ AND ENJOY A GLIMPSE IN THIS GLAMOROUS RESORT PERFECT FOR SKI NEWBIES

"*I mondo è un libro, e chi non viaggia legge solo una pagina.*" So said Saint Augustine, whose famous epithet, "The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only one page," is etched upon one of Hotel Giardino Mountain's many decorative walls, alongside the famous proclamations of other notable thinkers. Situated at almost 2,000 metres above sea level, between the Alpine peaks of Corvatsch and Corviglia, and huddled within the stunning Engadine valley, this intriguing **St Moritz** hotel, is the most breathtaking of locations, is certainly a crevice of the world worth exploring. Yes, even if, like me, you're a novice skier who's never so much as attempted a dry slope.

If you've visited St Moritz, you'll know ease of access is not one of it's main draws. However, in a country famed for its beauty, precision and practicality, the three-hour journey from Zurich, packed with postcard-worthy views, just adds to the adventure and allure. With a hot coffee and croissant in hand, I don't even bother with my Netflix downloads, instead opting to gaze out the window at the forests, lakes and snow-capped mountains as we ascend to exquisite St Moritz.

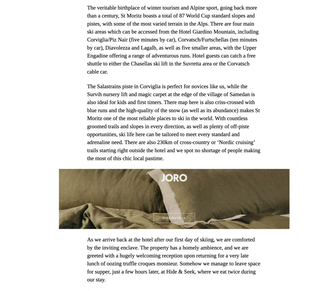
Greeted at the train station by our hotel transfer, the whole snowy journey is seamless. The hotel itself is conveniently located just five minutes from the station, and we pull up to a pretty yet unassuming property made up of seven traditional Engadine buildings. Extensively restored and conjoined to conjure an enchanting, quirky, but wholly authentic mountain hideaway, it's a property quite unlike any other.

With three fantastic restaurants – the continental and contemporary Hide & Seek, the traditional Swiss Stüva and the two **Michelin-starred** Ecco – as well as a knock-out bar and lounge, we are going to have to do a lot of skiing to justify the level of cheese eating in store. Between that and the beautiful spa, pool, sundeck, and ice skating rink, we wonder how we're going to pack it all in before we even contemplate hitting the famous slopes.

Finding our room requires navigating the labyrinthine layout, the hotel's décor reminiscent of a lavish garden maze with multiple faux flower walls, and even a dense, fauna and candle packed ceiling-scape, combined with black and white Alpine photography. Our room carries on with the theme, with the bathroom-to-bedroom dividing wall made up of a vast black and white photograph of two men skiing – something that catches me off guard more than once when I wake up bleary-eyed in the night. Following the rest of the property's mountain-chic meets magic garden theme, the rest of the room mixes vibrant purples and greens with faux fur and timber accents.

After a restorative night's sleep, and a delicious omelette at the property's main restaurant, Hide & Seek, we venture out try our hands at skiing for the first time. We head to the hotel's partnered ski school, **Suvretta Sports**, where you can hire all the equipment you need as well as book in for lessons. Having never been skiing before, my husband and I had already turned to luxury ski clothing rental company **Exclibi** before we left, who checked all our sizes and style preferences and sent us a tailored bundle the day before we flew. However, we still needed to be fitted for helmets, boots, and of course, skis, and the helpful team at Suvretta made sure we were safely and chicly kitted out before meeting with our dashing instructor.

Starting off on the nursery slopes with the other beginners (and children), our hour-long private lesson wasn't quite enough to get us skiing, but our guide couldn't have been more patient as we slipped and slid like slapstick comics, trying to find our feet. As well as private lessons, the school also runs teen camps, racing clubs, and snowboarding lessons, both group and private, as well as hosting St Moritz's famous cross-country ski clubs.



The veritable birthplace of winter tourism and Alpine sport, going back more than a century, St Moritz boasts a total of 87 World Cup standard slopes and piste, with some of the most varied terrain in the Alps. There are four main ski areas which can be accessed from the Hotel Giardino Mountain, including Corviglia/Piz Nair (five minutes by car), Corvatsch/Furtschellas (ten minutes by car), Diavolezza and Lagalb, as well as five smaller areas, with the Upper Engadine offering a range of adventurous runs. Hotel guests can catch a free shuttle to either the Chaselas ski lift in the Suvretta area or the Corvatsch cable car.

The Salastrain piste in Corviglia is perfect for novices like us, while the Survih nursery lift and magic carpet at the edge of the village of Samedan is also ideal for kids and first timers. There map here is also criss-crossed with blue runs and the high-quality of the snow (as well as its abundance) makes St Moritz one of the most reliable places to ski in the world. With countless groomed trails and slopes in every direction, as well as plenty of off-piste opportunities, ski life here can be tailored to meet every standard and adrenaline need. There are also 25Km of cross-country or 'Nordic cruising' trails starting right outside the hotel and we spot no shortage of people making the most of this chic local pastime.

As we arrive back at the hotel after our first day of skiing, we are comforted by the inviting enclave. The property has a homely ambience, and we are greeted with a hugely welcoming reception upon returning for a very late lunch of oozing truffle croques monsieur. Somehow we manage to leave space for supper, just a few hours later, at Hide & Seek, where we eat twice during our stay.

Perfectly described as 'familiar yet surprising', we sample as much as our stomachs can hold; from the scallop ceviche with avocado, mango, lemongrass, coriander and radish to the Galician style octopus with potato foam, pepper puree and crunchy amaranth. There's an unforgettable deer tartare with Jerusalem artichoke puree, miso, hazelnut mayonnaise, polenta chips and black truffle (as well as a rose tuna and horseradish version), while the lobster linguine, veal loin, and Chateaubriand are also outstanding, with the accompanying creamy mashed potatoes the best I've ever eaten.

The second day calls for a little exploring, and we take a scenic ten-minute drive down to the charming town. Packed with high-end designer shops, from Hermes and Moncler to Prada and Celine, the small, unassuming pavements are dotted with glamorous Europeans parading their finest fur and snow-worthy couture. We grab a quick snack of local cured meats and cheeses at a small deli, saving more room for dinner this time around, before going on a truly magical horse drawn carriage ride through the surrounding valleys and forests. As snow falls in a delicate flurry, the horse's finery jingling like sleigh bells, we bunker down beneath a fur throw and marvel at the splendour of the totally unspoiled landscape. From chocolate box churches covered in murals to uber-luxury chalets, each building quietly crowns to its majestic surrounds.

A sauna and steam, followed by a dip in the pool, promises a rejuvenating way of freshening up for dinner at Stüva, a traditional, folksy and utterly charming Swiss-style restaurant housed in a chalet-style outpost. A must-visit for all guests, the wood and fur-filled interior is Instagram hygge fodder (or whatever the Swiss version is called) – and the food is comforting on a whole new level.

We can't get enough of the fresh and tangy classic beef tartare with pickles, Worcestershire sauce and shallots, as well as the traditional onion soup with puff pastry, followed by an enormous golden veal escalope, which we make a big fuss about size-wise but still hoover up every morsel. As in the case across the hotel, the service is notably personal and unpretentious in what is one of the most up market ski resorts in the country.

Famed as one of the best gourmet restaurants in St Moritz, we don't sample the food at fine dining spot Ecco this time. A quick glance at executive chef Rolf Fliegauf's tasting menu, however, and it's not hard to see why it holds two Michelin stars and is packed to the rafters every night.

With its fairytale landscape, quaint, pristine town, and warm embrace of first-time skiers, St Moritz is the pinnacle of high-end ski destinations – practically screaming quiet luxury from every freshly powdered peak. With its cosy homes, warm service, and superb cuisine, Hotel Giardino Mountain doesn't just embrace the unique, authentic magic of St Moritz – it wrote Saint Augustine's so-called book on it.

From £710 per night, visit ***giardinohotels.ch; travelswitzerland.com***

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