

KNIGHTSBRIDGE
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Going Off Piste

Ann Abel visits the glorious Giardino Mountain, St. Moritz

There are other hotels in St. Moritz with more storied histories, more opulent luxury, and more name-brand cachet. You probably know them already. But outside the village center, there's one more that dazzles quietly in this highly dazzling corner of Alpine Switzerland. Giardino Mountain may not be the most prestigious address in town, but it's one that's fully aligned with the magic of St. Moritz in winter.

It's perfectly enmeshed with the light off the frozen lake, the champagne crispness of the air at 1,800 metres, and the sense that one has arrived somewhere above it all. Perched above the village of Champfèr on the edge of St. Moritz proper, Giardino Mountain inhabits its Alpine landscape with confidence. It also pulls off a delicate balancing act; it manages to be thrillingly contemporary without forgetting where it came from.

The property's origins lie in the sturdy, sun-baked farmhouses of the Engadin Valley, those thick-walled, sgraffito-decorated structures that have stood steadily in Graubünden for centuries. The hotel pays homage to that vernacular tradition, drawing on the proportions and materials of seven historic Engadin houses while reimagining them for the present. The building's bones speak of permanence and place; what's laid on top speaks of wit, energy and a desire to play. The public space, designed with an almost theatrical exuberance, layer bold graphic patterns, oversized artworks, and jewel-toned upholstery. Nothing is timid. Corridors become galleries; lounges become stages. Yet the spaces remain genuinely comfortable: warm, human in scale, and lit with a honeyed glow.

The rooms and suites continue this interplay between heritage and modernity. They sparkle with unexpected pops of colour against natural stone, hand-crafted textiles that nod to Alpine tradition, and vintage black-and-white photography. Many rooms look directly out onto the frozen shimmer of Lake Champfèr. Some have freestanding bathtubs in front of those windows.

Aesthetically pleasing as all of this is, what elevates Giardino Mountain is its culture of service. The staff here seem genuinely glad to see you. There's none of the studied formality one often finds in grand hotels. Instead, there's warmth, attentiveness, and an anticipation of needs. Staffers remember names and note

preferences. The effect is of staying somewhere that feels privately owned, a beautifully run home that's staffed by confident and competent professionals.

Food and drink occupy a central place in the experience. The hotel's showplace restaurant, Ecco St. Moritz, fully deserves its two Michelin stars. Gault&Millau named recently installed head chef Reto Brändli its Rising Star of the Year for 2026 (and awarded the restaurant 18 points) in recognition of his mix of bold flavours and classic French techniques. He works in a register that is precise without being cold, innovative without being alienating.

The tasting menus are acts of gastronomic storytelling, drawing on seasonal produce – Alpine herbs, lake fish, carefully sourced meats – and elevating them through techniques that illuminate rather than obscure their essential character. (It's worth noting here that those stories are tightly edited; the menus run to a very manageable four or five courses, a refreshing change from those 18-course marathons that have taken hold in the fine dining world.) A dish of Norwegian lobster with pumpkin, red curry, and Imperia caviar arrives as a study in contrasting intensities. Elsewhere, Brändli's gift for pairing bold flavour combinations – Ormalingen pork with kimchi and shiitake, for instance – reveals a chef who is as fluent in global culinary dialogue as he is rooted in his Alpine surroundings. The wine pairings, drawn from a cellar of impressive depth and intelligence, amplify each course with the attentiveness of a skilled collaborator.

The hotel's other dining options maintain high standards as well. The all-day Hide & Seek employs local ingredients in contemporary dishes with a bit of playful flair, and the cozy, wood-clad Stüva offers hearty comfort food like rösti potatoes with fried egg (and optional black truffles) and buckwheat pizzoccheri pasta with potatoes, savoy cabbage, sage, and creamy casera cheese. The bar, meanwhile, is the kind of place that fills up naturally at the end of a day on the slopes. It's a haven of amber light, excellent cocktails, and the easy sociability of people who have chosen, very well, where to spend their winter.

www.giardinohotels.ch

