

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 81 (2015)
Heft: [6]

Artikel: Magical days in winter - winter wonders in Wildhaus
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-943578>

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Magical Days in Winter – Winter Wonders in Wildhaus



There are essentially two ways to spend a winter in Switzerland: in the sun or in the 'sea of clouds' ("Wolkenmeer"). It is no secret that too much of the latter can lead to "seasonal affective disorder" (or in plain English: winter depression) and unless you are lucky enough to live above a sunbed salon, it is highly advisable to regularly swap the sombre greyness of city centres with the cheerful blue of mountain skies.

Thanks to Heidi (or Clara, rather) we all know about the healing effects of fresh mountain air. From my own experience I can tell you: after weeks of darkness, the touch of sun rays on your skin does wonders for your soul. In anticipation of the 'light treatment' in the mountains, my family would year after year escape to Wildhaus (1000 metres above sea-level). immediately after the Christmas family gatherings. What greets you up there in a cold winter is magical: Paddocks covered in fluffy white snow with the roofs of sheds just peeking through; frozen waterfalls glimmering and glittering in the sun. Air so fresh it hurts the lungs.

Once arrived, we could not wait to get outside. There are so many things you can do in the Alps in winter. One day, we would strap on our snow shoes and hike up to the restaurant

'Gamplüt' (1354 metres above sea-level). This surprisingly vigorous exercise gets you just in the right mood to grab a 'Cafe Amaretto' and a 'Schlorziflade' (traditional sweet pastry from the Toggenburg area), lean back in an armchair on the sun terrace and enjoy the stunning view of the seven 'Churfuersten'. The beauty of snowshoe walks is the solitude that you can find. Beyond the busy skiing slopes and away from restaurants, there are only ice-trees, snow fields, and a few animals. However, when we desired the hustle and bustle of the slopes, we'd get our skis and snowboards out of the garage first thing in the morning (ok, maybe it turned out to be midday in the end), purchase a ski ticket that covers the three regions Wildhaus, Unterwasser (2262 metres above sea-level on Chäserrugg) and Alt St. Johan and ride until the sun set. One of the highlights was lunch at the restaurant 'Gade' (<http://gadelodge.ch/sites/>). Their 'Äplermagronen' and 'Käsespätzli' are irresistible!

The evenings in Wildhaus are rather quiet as opportunities for entertainment are limited. However, insatiable sports fanatics can even ski at night on Wednesdays and Fridays and there are a number of decent restaurants and even a few bars around. Our evenings were typically spent in the cosy living

room after a hearty self-cooked meal. We often held serious Jass competitions that lasted an entire holiday. Swapping Jass evenings with other activities and thus forfeiting the chance to earn more points was often unacceptable (only terrific books and cryptic cross words counted as exceptions).

The highlight of the Christmas holiday was New Year's Eve. Not because we celebrated in a particular way (we may have put more effort into the meal or opened that other bottle of wine), but because this was the day that determined the Jass winner. Since the time between dinner and going to bed stretched considerably on 'Sylvester', we could never quite estimate how many games we could fit into the evening. Ultimately, it all came down to a battle of nerves (controlling the champagne intake often helped too). At 12am, after the winners were announced and the losers consoled, we huddled in warm jackets on the balcony, just in time to watch the fireworks from the mountain top and toast to the New Year in the freezing cold.

Ah, the memories. My recommendations for the Christmas holiday in Switzerland are straight-forward: Go to the mountains and soak up that sun. It's a guarantee for happiness!

Luzia Sauer