

Swiss Winter resorts

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SWISS WINTER RESORTS

The Swiss resorts which announce themselves as "winter stations" occupy altitudes varying from 3000 to 6000 feet above sea-level — in itself practically a guarantee for good sport conditions. Persons who are already familiar with the everyday snow and ice sports will undoubtedly enjoy a general tour of the leading winter stations, as each and everyone possesses some individual charm of its own, which the other lacks. Novices, however, will do well first to settle in one place and concentrate upon the mastery of toboggan, ski and skates. No end of fun can be gotten out of these initial attempts on snow and ice and every effort becomes a pleasant pastime. Expert tutors are available everywhere and the noviciate is generally of exceedingly short duration.

Switzerland in winter! We left London when it was enveloped in one of its proverbial fogs; we travelled through France, and the temperature was unpleasant and chilly — then we reached Switzerland, and conditions changed rapidly as we approached the highlands. Presently we boarded a trim little mountain railway and soon after it started its climb into the higher regions, the gray clouds which had at first obscured the sun suddenly dispersed, revealing a wonderland whose beauty surpassed all our expectations. Snow and ice everywhere, pure and sparkling, and holding out an irresistible lure to come and play. The graceful slopes and mountains which stand as sentinels to the giant peaks and glaciers a little further on bore a large assembly of heavily laden pine and fir trees and the dear little Alpine villages were wrapped in thick blankets of snow. Jack Frost had silenced the merry babbling of the mountain streams; huge icicles marked the silvery trail of the waterfalls; and the lakes, whose exquisite coloring used to enchant in summer, were one solid mass of ice! Nature was dormant, but the advent of this state of perfect repose becomes in the Alps at the same time the signal for a novel form of activity among men — winter sport.

Toboggans, bobsleighs and skis were piled high at every railroad station, and young and old moved about with such alertness and chatted and laughed so gaily together that we, too, began to anticipate eagerly the moment when we could mingle with this happy crowd.

While the snow sports comprise tobogganing, bobsleighbing and skiing, the ice sports include skating, curling and hockey. But both on snow and ice there are ever so many enjoyable variations of these exercises; "tailing" expeditions, when a whole row of sleighs are hitched together, and in serpent fashion wind their way along the country roads; gymkhanas, representing any funny stunt or competition which can take place on a rink or run. Then again there are the brilliant displays of the ski-jumpers, figure skaters and other exponents of winter sport varieties developed into an art, and at night even the rinks are frequently illuminated for fancy dress balls and carnivals, vying in splendor with the brilliant social affairs held in the hotels.

And those who do not clamor for social life and gaieties spend their days in the great outdoors, where, provided they are proficient on skis, they can seek the edifying solitude of the loftier regions.

Winter is at the same time an opportunity for friendly visits among the peasants and if one stays sufficiently long in one district to form a few acquaintances with the inhabitants, invitations to spend an evening with the family are not seldom, for the Swiss delight to listen to tales of foreign lands. Delicious home-made bread and cheese are presently served as refreshments, for the Swiss have a very generous strain of hospitality, and grandfather or grandmother who invariably occupies a seat near the comfort-providing tile stove, knows a few old stories or legends connected with the Christmas and New Year days of the distant past.

Yule tide in Switzerland, where the decorations of nature are themselves suggestive of Christmas, is full of poetic charm. Instead of Santa Claus, it was Christkindli, an angel in resplendent robes of white, who was regarded as the bringer of all the festive happiness and gifts, and every home, no matter how humble or primitive it may be, had on that night of nights a fragrant pine tree decked with glittering threads of silver and gold, tempting apples, nuts and dainty cookies.

While Arosa, Klosters, Davos, Samaden, Pontresina and St. Moritz occupy the star positions among the many enchanting winter stations in the canton of the Grisons, Rigi-Kaltbad, Andermatt and Engelberg figure as the leaders in Central Switzerland, and Grindelwald, Wengen, Mürren, Beatenberg, Kandersteg, Adelboden form a picturesque group in the heart of the Bernese Oberland. Another charming line of resorts is dotted along the scenic Montreux-Bernese Oberland Railway with Zweisimmen, Gstaad, Château-d'Oex and Les Avants in the lead. Connected by railway and cable-tram with lovely Montreux-Territet towers Caux above the Lake of Geneva. Southeast of the lake are Leysin, Villars, Chesières, Morgins and Champéry, and higher up in the valley of the Rhône are Leukerbad and Montana, while Ste. Croix-Les Rasses, Le Pont, St-Cergue and Mont Soleil are favorites in the Jura district.

But Switzerland is a land of dual personality, a land of striking contrasts where northland and southland meet. For while winter sports are at their best in the mountainous regions above mentioned, there are also districts in the same country where King Zero can not exist. Thus one can flit to the canton of Ticino, Italian Switzerland, with Locarno at the head of Lake Maggiore and Lugano on its own lovely lake, at any time when one desires a change of surroundings. Here, within a few hours railway journey of the realm of winter sports, one finds the refreshing verdure of spring in the height of winter, with a profusion of sweetly scented blossoms and lakes of a caressing, tender blue. Truly, winter has its fascinations in Switzerland.

Mary Widmer.

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