



The Seasons in St. Moritz

St. Moritz in Switzerland is well-known as a chic, elegant winter resort but there's more to this alpine town than skiing and bobsleighs. Giselle Whiteaker savours St. Moritz in summer.

The train from Zurich to St. Moritz wends its way through the fairy-tale Swiss landscape, the mountains looming on either side of the line dotted with classic alpine villages. It's a spectacular way to arrive at the renowned birthplace of Alpine winter holidays and as we pull into the station the drizzle ends, grey clouds parting to reveal deep-blue skies as if in anticipation of our arrival.

St. Moritz, nestled in the Upper Engadine valley at an elevation of 1,856 metres, boasts plenty of sunny days across the seasons, just one of the reasons for its popularity with the jet-setting rich and famous. Of course, the 350-kilometres of pistes



and state-of-the-art infrastructure, the oldest natural ice bob run, 200-kilometres or so of cross-country ski trails and 150-kilometres of winter walking trails also play a role in the allure of this winter wonderland. When the ski season kicks off in November, the luxury hotels, restaurants and shops in the charming village buzz with activity, snow bunnies from around the globe making their way here to see and be seen.

Checking into the gorgeous Kulm Hotel St. Moritz, I'm happy to be here before the first snowflakes fall. From the balcony of my enchanting room, bedecked with stylish touches of local craftsmanship, I gaze out at the spectacular Alpine peaks overlooking the cobalt



water of Lake St.Moritz, breathing in pure mountain air. At the beginning of the year, the lake freezes, becoming the venue for winter polo matches and White Turf horse racing, but today, a lone sailboat is zig-zagging towards the shore. I plan to be on that lake tomorrow, but this evening I'm heading to the Kulm's Trattoria-style pizzeria, to feast on exquisite seafood and pizza from the wood-fired oven.

Whether it's a result of the fresh air, the plush bed, or the hearty evening meal, I wake refreshed, ready to tackle the day. My friends are off to Samedan Golf Course to participate in the Handicap International Golf Cup, raising much-needed funds for Handicap International, an independent and impartial organisation that is currently advocating in 59 countries for people with disabilities and in emergency situations. I'm chasing less altruistic pursuits. At the lakeshore, I slip on a life jacket and skim across the water on a paddleboard, admiring the views with only a small wobble each time I dip the paddle. Weekend sailors have made their way to the small lake too, the colourful sails capturing both breeze and sunlight.

When the Maloja wind sets in around noon, the kite-surfers gather at Lake Silvaplana less than five miles away. I cycle past them on an electric bike the Kulm has arranged for me, the battery providing the extra pedal power I need to tackle the mountainous terrain. The wind whips my hair as I admire the aerial antics of the proficient kite-surfers, who launch themselves from the small waves rippling the lake's surface, gliding effortlessly into the air and inspiring the novices who are learning how to master the power of the kites on land.

For the return leg, I veer onto a cycling path on the eastern side of the lake, which takes me through beautiful woodlands. The undulations put the e-bike to the test; a test it passes with flying colours. I still have to put in some work, but I quickly learn to gear-down for the steeper sections, successfully ascending sections where I'd normally be forced to walk.

Peddalling past Lake St. Moritz, I arrive at the smaller Lake Staz. I'm working on the theory that the smaller the lake, the warmer the water. People are stretched out on the grass by the lake, soaking up the sun, and a group of teenagers splash and play in the water. Inching down the ladder at the end of the small, wooden jetty, I realise that warmth is relative. The icy coolness makes my toes tingle, but I can't back out now. With a deep breath,



At the Kulm Hotel St Moritz (www.kulm.com), summer room rates start from CHF535 (approximately £365) for two people sharing a double room on a half-board basis. For reservations, please call +41 81 836 8000 or email info@kulm.com.

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I launch into the water, my body quickly adjusting to the somewhat frigid temperature. The refreshing dip re-energises me for the final uphill cycle back to the Kulm Hotel.

In the evening, we convene at the Dracula Club, a private venue on the premises of the Kulm Hotel St. Moritz. On any other day, we wouldn't be granted entry, but our visit coincides with the public Festival da Jazz and we are treated to a performance by rising Norwegian star, saxophonist Marius Neset.

The weather is against us on our final day. We awake to a chill in the air, which is thick with fog. We don't let this deter us from the hike we have planned to Piz Nair at 10,026 feet. Well, some of us anyway. Some opt to catch the funicular and cable-car combination, while a few of us wrap up in waterproof jackets and set off to stretch our legs on the mid-section. While the views are non-existent, it's an exhilarating ramble that traverses the mountain, the tinkle of cowbells lending a mystical air to the indistinct landscape.

At the pinnacle, we partake in the gourmet summit at The Panorama Restaurant, a four-course-menu prepared by a team of chefs; Fabrizio Piantanida of the Grand Hotel Kronenhof, Hans Nussbaumer of the Kulm Hotel St. Moritz and Erwin Koch, chef of The Panorama Restaurant. The epicurean delights include marinated lake trout from Sils, quail consommé and braised rump of beef Bergeller style, concluding with Engadine sour cream pudding with

blueberries and Engadine nut slice. The fog-filled view is quickly forgotten, our attention diverted by this delicious sampling of regional flavours.

Back at the Kulm Hotel, our band of merry-makers disperses. I head straight to the spa, keen to spend some time in the outdoor pool, with its spectacular views across the valley. Sinking into the warm water, I drift through the series of spa jets, all of which target different areas of the body. I'm already relaxed by the time my treatment rolls around – an invigorating massage, as a reward for completing the mountain hike. I feel thoroughly pampered when I float back to my room to change for dinner.

Tonight, we are dining in Le Grand Restaurant at the Kulm Hotel St. Moritz. Grand it is, the windows lining the immense room framed by red and gold drapes, the tables dressed in crisp, white tablecloths with a centrepiece of twinkling red candles. We dine on traditional Swiss fare as we toast our magnificent surroundings, both within the hotel and across the valley.

The Kulm Hotel St. Moritz has farewelled its summer season, closing its doors as it prepares for the onslaught of winter. In December, the hotel will start welcoming the cool-climate crowd. They, too, will sample gin with Master Somelier Benjamin Wolf at the hotel's Altitude Bar, partake in luscious feasts in the hotel's numerous restaurants and kick back in the wee hours in the Sunny Bar. Perhaps I'll come back. ■