

Bring on the



girls

Hardcore Austrian resort St Anton attracts droves of men, but fewer women. Last season, to try to reset the balance, the resort launched Ladies First weeks, with lots of discounts and freebies. We find 12 ways to enjoy St Anton the less macho way

WORDS Catherine Weakley and Leslie Wolf with thanks to Rozina Ali



1 TRAVEL IN STYLE

When Ms Glamourpussy and her two wing women hit St Anton, there's little tangling with t-bars – we opt for the limos of lifts. No stairs, thank the lord, into the Galzigbahn gondola from town, instead we enter a cabin at ground level before it sweeps skywards on giant cogs. The many heated chairlifts with bubble covers are compensation for impromptu facials from over-active snow cannons. And we're lured across town to Rendl's slopes by a double whammy – a gondola with heated seats. But a lady discount on the lift pass would be nice.

Girlie points 5/10



2 GO FOR AN UPGRADE

No need to make do when shops offer us girls complimentary upgrades to VIP kit when hiring equipment. At Alber Sports it's worth over €25 on a six-day package, plus those with their own skis bag a free electronic binding check worth €15 when they check their kit in for a professional service (€37). We follow our mechanic into his tool-heavy workshop and ask to see how his pneumatic drill works. No dice, but we do score storage for our kit in the shop, freeing up our hands for some dedicated après ski.

Girlie points 9/10





3 DINE OUT, DINE UP

St Anton has dining choices in spades – we narrow them down by the quality of their discounts. A free aperitif ticks our box at Gletscherblick, a pine-lined four-star hotel with a five-star kitchen, while 10 per cent off the bill does the trick at the swanky Arlberg Hospiz where, right in the middle of our hot, sweet Salzburger Nockerl soufflé Ms Glamourpussy is targeted by a tall, dark and handsome Swedish hockey player. A date is made. The hotel organises weddings confides the restaurant manager.

Girlie points 10/10



WOLFGANG ELM, FREDRICH SCHMIDT, LESLIE WOIT, CATHERINE WEAKLEY

4 CHECK OUT THE PRIVATES

Skischule Arlberg has an incentive for the hardcore lady – free safety-kit rental worth €10 when booking an off-piste course (four hours for €65 a head). However, in a whiteout, a private lesson is more to our taste (four hours, €242, each additional person €20). Well worth the spend, since as well as passing on a tip or 10, our lovely instructor Florian helps with underarm vents and professionally treads the line between flattery and flirting. Sadly, the hut where instructors provide leg massages in times of need turns out to be a myth.

Girlie points 7/10



5 BAG A PEAK (WITH OR WITHOUT SKIS)

Who says doing St Anton's legendary Valluga has to be macho? On a sunny day we hop into the tiny beer-can gondola that sheers straight up to a spectacular observation platform. An off-piste descent from here is one option, but only if you have a mountain guide. We don't, so our skis stay at the bottom of the lift while we check out one of the wildest views in the Alps. No incentives required to make this trip, and there's even a bench to sit on at the top.

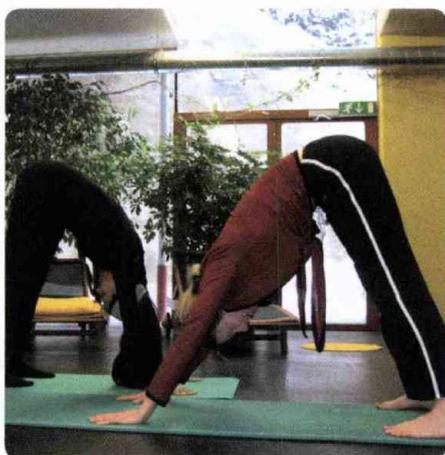
Girlie points 10/10



6 SETTLE IN FOR THE LONG HAUL

Nothing says "I love life" more than a few hours of piste cruising followed by a serious lunch, especially when there's free stuff on the cards – get involved at Mooserwirt, Sennhutte, Krazy Kanguruh and Arlberg Hospiz. But our only enticement is meeting Ms Glamourpussy's date when we sashay into the elegant Goldener Berg in neighbouring Oberlech – late, owing to a crack in the map. He's already left so instead we join a group of nine men high on Valluga lines, led by handsome guide Toni Zangerle. Just repeat, skiing after lunch is for wimps.

Girlie points 8/10



7 STRETCH OUT AND FORGET ABOUT ENGLAND

Nothing says mountain getaway like a proper pamper. At the spa at the cushy Hotel Alte Post the Shell Massage (€72 for 50 minutes, ladies enjoy 20 per cent off) uses luxurious oils, shells and cinnamon balsam to leave us feeling fragrant 'n' tasty. Then some intensive anti-wrinkle care (€93 for 85 minutes) at the Hotel Schwarzer Adler (10 per cent discount) has doormen asking for our ID – and phone numbers. Whatever next? A yoga class (€8) at the Lux Alpinae hotel, with free herbal tea for ladies.

Girlie points 9/10



8 STAY PURE

Up the mountain early evening, we risk our reputations at the table-dancing meat markets of Krazy Kangruh and Mooserwirt. Venue-sponsored free drinks come only when you buy food, but being friendly to men scores us seats, drinks and an invite to ski the Valluga. Ms Glamourpussy would prefer free beluga, but doesn't turn down being carried down the darkened slopes back to town. Later, accepting invitations to dance brings a frisson of fun. But after a decent amount of shimmying, we make our excuse – early morning yoga – and leave.

Girlie points 4/10



9 TRY A BIT ON THE SIDE

In search of après without lager lads, we ooh and ahh at the Snow Must Go On, a free outdoor fireworks and multimedia spectacle put on every Wednesday at 9pm, and visit the atmospheric ski-to-the-door Ski Museum (€4, no lady bribes). There's cool architecture to admire – Zaha Hadid designed the funky glass Galzigbahn gondola – and, at the Scando-chic Arlberg-Well leisure complex, girls score a free sauna worth €5 with a €12.50 swim, while sporting activities at the Arl.Rock centre come at a 10 per cent discount.

Girlie points 7/10



10 WORK THE PUBS

We only visit pubs offering us free drinks, cavorting with classy guests at the Sonn Bichl and Dorfplatz hotels, rapidly exiting the sleazy Kandahar bar with its dancing pole (metal not eastern bloc). At the Piccadilly, envious men eye us from behind their steins – not due to our free fizz but because girls don't get charged €2 by coat nazis at the door. As we leave, a pair of desperados ask to swap shoes with us – it's 11.30pm, and the bouncer refuses them entry as they're still in ski boots. If they were ladies they'd get 10 per cent off a new pair in Schuhhaus Hütt.

Girlie points 4/10



11 ESCAPE TO A NICE HOTEL

"Burp..." A gang of marauding drunks walks the snowy street behind us – are they going to our hotel? Thankfully not. A civilised resting place, though undiscounted, provides welcome respite from men who've forgotten how to behave when away from their womenfolk. The Waldhof in Stadle is a bit out of town but sympathetic hosts Michael and Andrea provide a calm atmosphere, elegantly served, delicious food, a groaning basket of scented toiletries, cloud like duvets – and no burping.

Girlie points 10/10



12 MAKE A BOUTIQUE CALL

Every girl loves a bargain, and we hunt them down in shops from Mooserwirt to Sport Pete, from Peak Performance to Ski West – our 10 to 20 per cent lady discounts make purchasing so painless. Ms Glamourpussy is sorely tempted by a jacket for €700, but a helmet at a 10 per cent discount in Sport Schranz, or 20 per cent off a backpack at the North Face store are so much more St Anton. Oh dear, she's late for her date again, in Café Village at the Alte Post (the free soft drink with a snack might keep her on the straight and narrow).

Girlie points 7/10

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Sadly for Chloe the rumour of free Jimmy Choos at the bottom was unfounded

DETAILS, DETAILS

Ladies First runs from 8 to 29 January 2011. Pick up vouchers for discounts and freebies at the tourist office. Seven nights' half board at the Waldhof hotel (0043 544 640509; www.waldhof-stanton.com) starts at €756 a head. Rail Europe (0844 848 4070; www.raileurope.co.uk) offers train travel from London to St Anton, changing in Paris and Zurich, from £243 return. Seven nights' b&b in the four-star Hotel Banyan starts at £899 with Crystal (0871 231 2256; www.crystal-ski.co.uk) including flights and transfers.