

Eat the Arlberg

by **Caroline Sargent** - Sunday January 30, 2011 12:05 pm

The Arlberg region of Austria attracts posers, princes and even the Pope to its world class slopes and it's not only for the skiing that they flock. This is the home of Alpine hospitality and some very fine food.



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Known as the 'cradle of skiing', the Arlberg covers 280 kilometres of vertiginous scenery, from the remote hamlets of Stuben and St Christoph to the pretty villages of Zürs and Lech and the lively St Anton at its heart. In the summer it's awash with flora and fauna, hikers and mountain bikers; in the winter it disappears under 3ft of snow and receives bus loads of (sorry, but you are) mentalists intent on throwing themselves down powdery inclines. For fun.

As you might have guessed, I'm not a born skier. I tried it during a week in St Anton for the first time and on, I might add, some of the most testing terrain you can find in Europe, and while I can do it, I just don't get the attraction. My idea of a holiday does not involve paying through the nose to look ridiculous, feel inadequate and put my life in mortal danger on a daily basis. Call me mardy if you like. It does, however, involve imbibing a higher than average number of cocktails and plenty of authentic, good quality, local food.



This area prides itself on its hospitality and warm welcome, a tradition that dates back 600 years when a kind hearted – possibly demented - shepherd called Heinrich Findelkind built a hostelry just below the highest point of the Arlberg pass at 1,800 metres, as a shelter for weary travellers. The snow here can reach roof height so this was no mean feat.

To finance the project he founded the Fellowship of St Christoph which today

has many illustrious benefactors among its 17,000 members, many of whom make a point of visiting The Hospiz - now a five-star hotel renowned for its award-winning kitchen and vaulted wine cellar - during their annual mountain retreat. Some have their photos taken for the wall of fame, a pub style montage graced by an altogether better class of regular, such as Prince Albert, King Carlos of Spain, Vladimir Putin, even Pope Benedict. [Which kind of begs the question, how does the Pope get to such a remote outpost? On his Pope-skis?]

Being neither rich nor famous, I didn't sample enough of The Hospiz hospitality to adequately review it other than to tell you that there are bottles of wine in there the size of farmyard animals, the waiters are decked out like Pinocchio on smack and a glass of Coke costs 7 Euro.

Back in the valley of St Anton we found our own refuge at The Waldhof, a new hotel on the outskirts of town run by Michael and Andrea Ladner. The beauty of this place, aside from the pristine contemporary pine interior décor, is that you're getting all the best bits of The Hospiz at half the price. Andrea managed front of house at the five-star hotel for 18

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