

Ski season

THE RESORT STILL FIT FOR A KING



Klosters village in the Swiss Alps; Charles skiing there in 2004

Charles may have cancelled Klosters this year, but it's easy to see why it's his favourite ski resort, says *Mary Novakovich*

It's 4pm and I'm in the Coop supermarket in Klosters, where much of the mountain village's population seems to be having a gossip over the cheese counter. This is the Swiss resort where King Charles has been skiing since 1978, giving it the royal seal of approval and, in many people's eyes, turning it into another glitzy St Moritz or Gstaad. Only Klosters is not remotely like St Moritz or Gstaad.

There are no five-star hotels, for a start. I don't see any designer boutiques – rather, more down-to-earth sports shops and a cute place selling second-hand bric-a-brac. Nor is there much evidence of the fur-coat-and-chihuahua brigade. In fact, at first glance, it's understated, discreet, decidedly unflashy and full of the pretty wooden architecture you always expect in the Alps but don't always find. There's even an adorable little museum recreating rural life in Klosters over the centuries (£4.50; museum-klosters.ch). It's not even comparatively expensive. In the same Coop I spot my favourite Swiss white wine, chasselas, at five Swiss francs – £4.50. It's £18 in the UK.

Klosters celebrated its 800th birthday in 2022, so it's not exactly an upstart. Nor does it have the busy, urban atmosphere of its bigger neighbour Davos, with which it shares an enormous (300km) ski domain simply called Davos Klosters.

"Low-key chic," is how James Palmer-

Tomkinson, owner of the Klosters ski specialist PT Ski, describes the village when we meet up to go skiing. "It's not somewhere to see and be seen. You're just as likely to find a farmer weighing their bananas in the Coop as the chairman of a big City institution."

Palmer-Tomkinson should know. His Klosters roots go back generations thanks to his Swiss grandmother, Doris, who was a ski champion – just like his British grandfather, father and two uncles. It was his father, Charlie, who introduced the King to Klosters 45 years ago and he instantly fell for the old-fashioned charm of the place. "Because my father took him off-piste the press couldn't follow," Palmer-Tomkinson says. "He could just have a completely blissful holiday away from them all."

The feeling is mutual. In 2018 Klosters renamed its Gotschna cable car HRH the Prince of Wales and held a special dinner for him – for which he was late because he spent too much time talking to all the villagers. This season the cable car reads: "King Charles III. A treasured guest of Klosters since 1978." Not surprisingly, however, with the impending coronation, he has decided to forego this year what for almost 45 years has been a much-treasured annual holiday.

He's not the only thing missing in action during my visit. As luck would have it I'm there in early January during the snow drought. At this time of year the mountains of Davos Klosters have

enough snow to make it worthwhile, even if the runs that go down to the village are barren. (At other times of the year there are no-snow diversions such as hiking, fat-biking and, from April 5-10, the Tastentage music festival featuring classical, jazz and world music.)

I'm introduced to Davos Klosters' most impressive ski area, Parsenn, by my guide, Heinz, from Ski School Klosters. After the initial crush on the King Charles III cable car, we're high above the treeline on broad, sweeping red and blue slopes.

One of the beauties of Parsenn is the length of its runs, the most famous being the 12km run from Weissfluhjoch to Küblis near Klosters, but the lack of snow on its final section sadly puts paid to that. The piste that leads to lunch is also snowless, forcing us to take Parsenn's funicular down to Davos Dorf and a bus to the hamlet of Wolfgang. I can't say I'm disappointed – who can resist a ride on a funicular? – not least because the black piste leading to Wolfgang is quite challenging. It's also one of the King's favourite runs, which handily leads to one of his regular haunts, Kessler's Kulm (mains from £17; kessler-kulm.ch).

There's no ostentation at Kessler's Kulm, just a warm pine interior and the chance to sample one of the Graubünden region's most rustic dishes. Capuns are like a Swiss version of cabbage rolls, with spätzle dough and meat wrapped in chard leaves and smothered in cheese. I'm not sure where they rank on Charles's list of

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Swiss dishes, but they swiftly top mine.

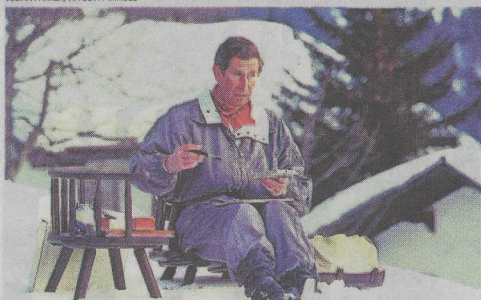
The next day Palmer-Tomkinson takes me over to Jakobshorn, the mountain that looms over Davos Platz and is crisscrossed with wide motorway runs. Over a warming hot chocolate at cosy Fuxägufer he tries to sum up Klosters' appeal. "I think it's unique in Klosters that you sk these other villages and take a train bac and it's just rather charming. You're slightly going back in time to the way skiing used to be. It's quite nostalgic." There's still a healthy dose of modernity, though – most of the old T-bars were replaced with chairlifts years ago.

We meet up for dinner with Clair Southwell, Charles's former PA, who has since made Klosters her home. Over goulash and spätzle at Gasthaus Höhwald (mains from £31; hoehwald-klosters.ch),

Continued on page 10 →

Travel Ski season

JULIAN PARKER/VIA GETTY IMAGES



Charles loves to paint as well as ski in the mountains

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Charles wore just two suits, and ancient rear-entry boots

→ Continued from page 9

Southwell recalls how Charles would set up his easel in the mountains after a late lunch. “He knows the mountains from painting, and that’s his passion,” she says. I mention those photos of Charles in

Klosters, always in the same blue ski suit. Southwell laughs. “In those days he would wear just two suits all the time, and ancient rear-entry boots. He never wanted fancy ski clothes.”

I squeeze in a few runs on Madrisa, the only mountain that’s solely in Klosters. It has a family zone and is the location for another royal favourite – a black run that winds its way down to the village.

It’s only at the end of a ski day that I notice something missing. Après-ski is as low-key as life in Klosters itself. There’s a glühwein stall outside Hotel Alpina, another on the terrace of Hotel Chesa Grischuna – former haunt of most of 1950s Hollywood – and, behind the

railway station, the tented Graströchni bar. Everyone else seems to be in the Coop or in their hotel spas.

Evenings are just as laid-back. Drinks in the Hotel Wynegg’s bar perhaps, or, if you’re still awake at 10pm, cocktails at the only nightclub, Casa Antica. A party town it isn’t, but for a place to unwind and savour mountain life, Klosters is fit for a king.

Mary Novakovich was a guest of Destination Davos Klosters (davos.ch), Switzerland Tourism (myswitzerland.com) and Silvretta Parkhotel, which has B&B doubles from £240 (silvretta.ch). Fly to Zurich