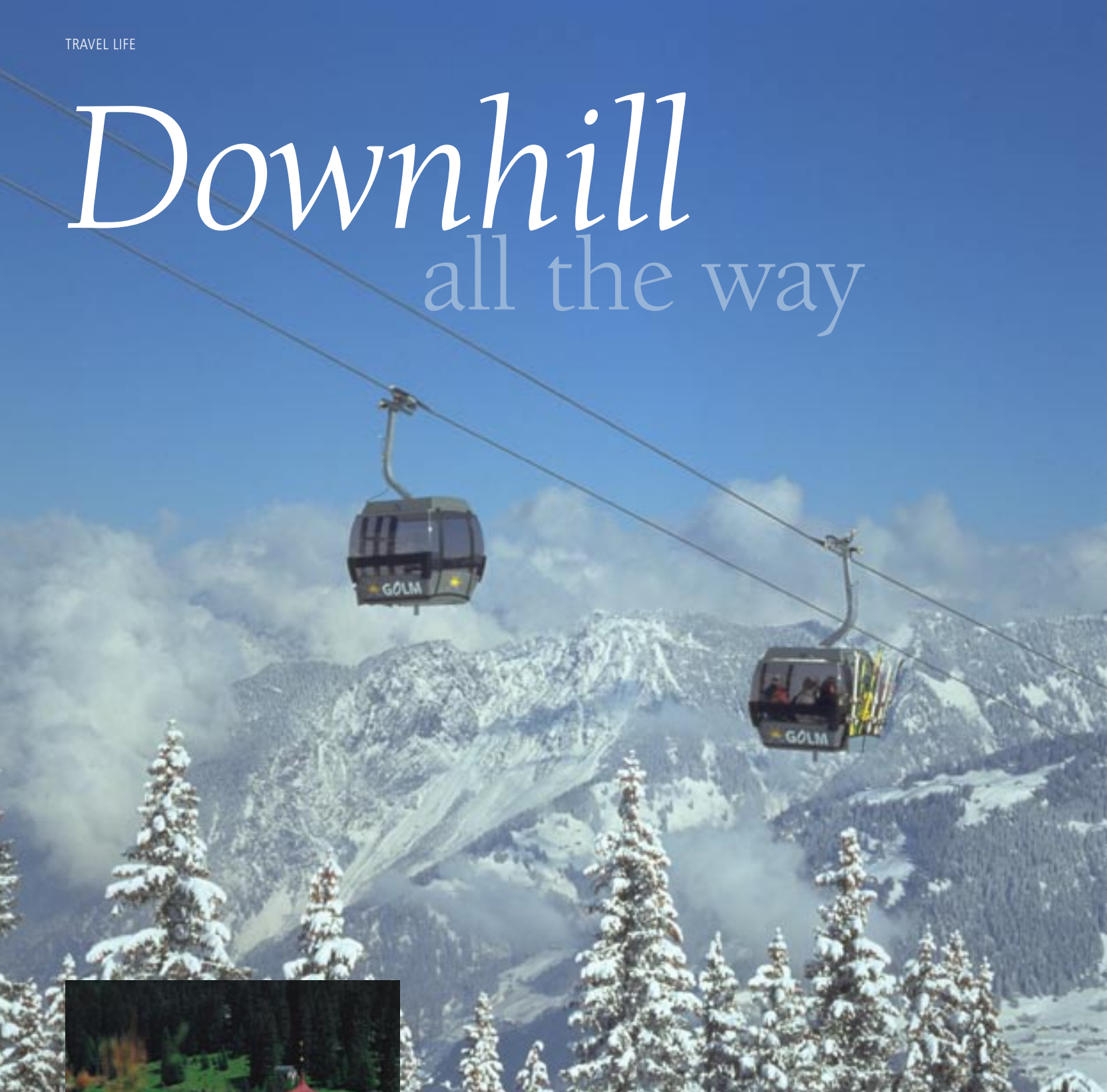


Downhill

all the way



YOU MIGHT BE ABOUT TO PACK AWAY YOUR SKIS FOR ANOTHER YEAR, BUT BEFORE YOU DO, CONSIDER THESE GREAT HOLIDAY OPTIONS FOR NEXT SEASON, CHOSEN BY SKI-MEISTER ROB REES - AND BOOK EARLY!

Above Get up high to really appreciate the scenery **Left** Montafon - great for families, at any time of year



You've done France to death, America is too far for a refreshing week and you are fed up with hearing those endless London SW6 accents in the bars and lift queues of the 'big name' European ski resorts. Worry not; in the Hidden Alps there are still some undiscovered gems where you can find a holiday with a difference, something for a long weekend, something for the family or somewhere to put on the style - all within easy reach of our local airports.

BEST FOR FAMILIES: [Montafon, Vorarlberg in Austria](#)

Silvretta Montafon is a hidden valley just 20 minutes inside the Austrian-Swiss border; a family ski paradise, housing 11 different villages and with as many motorway red kilometres as well-known Zermatt. The area offers outstanding value and child-friendly service. The regional ski pass gives complete access to the entire valley's cable cars and ski lifts and there are some excellent deals at certain times of the season. In late season (mid March to mid April), there are family-friendly weeks where kids go free in their parents' room and all of the 10 ski schools are discounted.

The best skiing areas are the extensive Silvretta Nova (accessible from the villages of Gaschurn and St Gallenkirch), compact Golm and the winter funpark of Hochjoch. Golm is bathed with sun in the morning and has the testing Diabolo (devil!) black run, new this season, the red World Cup run and a delightful wooded descent to the reservoir at Latschau.

Schruns is the largest town in the valley and for many years hosted the Austrian Women's Ski Championship. A cable car and gondola from the centre open up a vast children's teaching and crèche facility on Hochjoch and there are a variety of blue-red runs available. There are simply loads of other activities too - a 100km of cross-country skiing tracks, 290 km of winter rambles and six toboggan runs, the highlight being the 6km Garfrescha run to St Gallenkirch which is floodlit three nights a week. For non skiers, Silbertal and Bartholomäberg offer 60km of marked trails for walking and snowshoeing, unlocking stunning views of the Zimba, the Matterhorn of Vorarlberg, and the 3312m glacial peak of Piz Buin (of international sun cream fame!). On top of that is the covered artificial ice rink at Activpark Montafon in Schruns where the whole family can discover the joys of curling. Nearest airports Friedrichshafen and Zurich. ▶

Top Montafon at night - quite dreamy **Centre** Stunning buildings peek out so it's worth a tour at Montafon **Bottom** Teaching youngsters



BEST FOR LONG WEEKENDS: Villars, Vaud in Switzerland

With its mountain railway and gentle, low-altitude slopes, Villars is the kind of place that has been overshadowed by modern mega-resorts but with its improved lifts and extensive intermediate cruising links with Les Diablerets, it is now the perfect spot for a ski weekend with bags of old world charm.

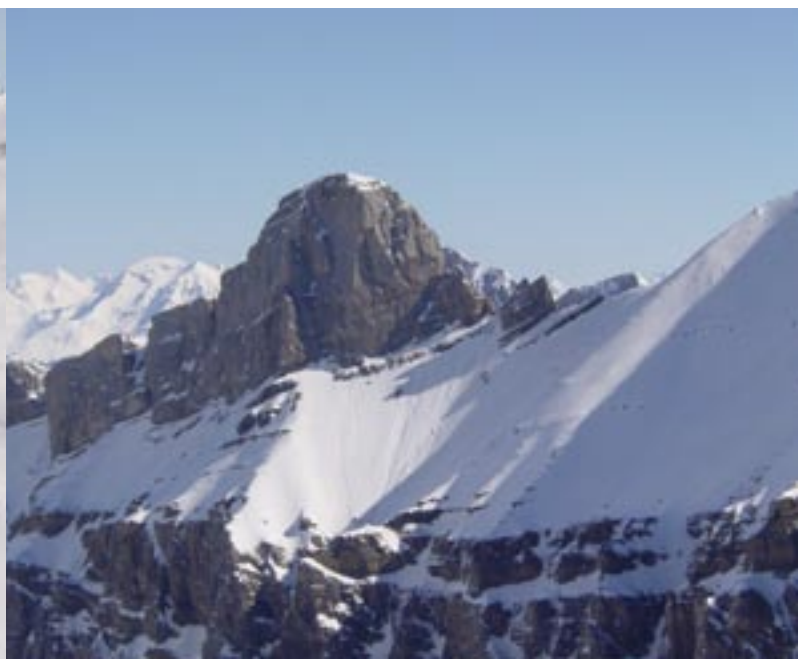
With a transfer time of less than an hour and a half from Geneva airport, the 120km ski area of Villars-Gryon-Les Diablerets, is the largest in the Vaudoise Alps. A cog railway takes you from the heart of the village up the mountain to Bretaye and the majestic Diablerets glacier at 3000m.

On a late weekend in March, we had dreamlike conditions - deep powder and scorching sunshine - made even better by

Villars' stunning location overlooking an awesome panorama from Lake Geneva to Mont Blanc.

For maximum après ski, the bustling village centre offers lively venues with authentic Swiss cafés and a selection of quality restaurants. Vieux Villars is good for tasty regional dishes but the best recommendation has to be hotel La Renardière. Renovated in 2003 with welcoming rooms in three connected wooden chalets, patron Yves Defalque runs a top establishment with a Ritz-trained sommelier and a fromagier in charge of a cheese board of about 30 varieties! You'll haul yourself back onto the plane on Sunday night exhausted in more ways than one by this perfect weekend playground. Nearest airport Geneva.

Above left There are plenty of other activities available at Villars **Above right** At the top at Villars **Below left** Villars; ready to head off **Below right** The mountain ranges at Villars





BEST FOR DOING IT IN STYLE: Serfaus, Tirol in Austria

Serfaus is undoubtedly one of Austria's premier resorts for a stylish and effortless holiday, offering everything from five-star luxury spa hotels to top hotels catering solely for families. A free underground railway serves four stops throughout the village and cars are banned, creating a delightfully peaceful village. Most hotels are a mere 10 minutes from the piste. No lugging heavy ski gear up icy streets as you can store your equipment at Franz Patscheider's depot where all boots are heated and disinfected every night.

Serfaus, in the western part of the Tirol, is interconnected with the villages of Fiss and Ladis in what is termed the Ski Dimension circus. With 160km of slopes - 115km of which are above 2000m, ensuring the snow stays in optimum condition from December

right through to the end of April. Serfaus nestles on a plateau high above the Inn River valley, sheltered in a natural bowl which is allegedly Austria's biggest suntrap, enjoying over 2000 hrs of sunshine! You can ski all day too without covering the same run twice with wide slopes for beginners and some great black runs and powder. Kaunertal, where the British ski team trains on the glacier, is just down the road. Once you've had your exercise, Serfaus is undoubtedly the place for taking it easy and pampering yourself. Try the endless spa treatments at the 5-star Hotel Cervosa which can offer everything from foot reflexology to hay baths and Kaiserin Cissi baths (a posh jacuzzi with rose oil to tone your skin). It's definitely the resort for experiencing the finer things in life. Nearest airports Friedrichshafen & Innsbruck. ▶

Above left Airboarding at Serfaus **Above centre top** Ski hut Masner at Serfaus **Above centre bottom** Relax at Serfaus **Above right** Serfaus Skifahrer **Below left** A night view of Serfaus **Below right** Fantastic vistas at Serfaus





BEST FOR A SKI HOLIDAY WITH A DIFFERENCE: Hut-to-hut ski safari in the Northern Dolomites, Trentino-Alto Adige in Italy.

It's frustrating to visit one of the massive ski areas and just scratch the surface. Here is the perfect antidote. A week long, hut-to-hut ski safari where you're in a different bed every night! From the Seiseralp to Cortina and onto the Marmolada, you can easily cover the classic Dolomites peaks, ski the famous Sella Ronda and tick off Val Gardena with its famous World Cup downhill run, Alta Badia, Sella, Pordoi, Arabba, Corvara and the Val di Fassa. Guided safaris are Friday-Friday or Sunday-Sunday so you can avoid the charter crowds at our airports. With Stefan Paungger of Dolomiten Holiday Event Service you'll get right in to the surreal winter landscape of the Dolomites following in the footsteps of Sly Stallone in Cliffhanger. New towering ranges and breathtaking untracked slopes are a daily discovery with good skiers able to enjoy steep off-piste descents from the 2890m Sella plateau, the narrow Val Setus and the incredibly steep Holzer gap. Also on the itinerary is a cable car trek to the top of the 3250m Marmolada - a magnificent viewpoint with one of the most beautiful runs in the whole Alps! There is an alternative safari traversing the Dolomites from west to southwest via the Latemar and Pala mountain groups. Nearest airports Milan Bergamo, Venice Marco Polo and Innsbruck ■

Above left top Hard work - but the rewards of a ski safari are worth the effort **Above right top** Experienced team leaders will take you to unknown locations on a ski safari **Above left bottom** Top runs as well as cross-country ski-ing on a safari **Above right bottom** A great way to make new friends

ACCOMMODATION

Villars; www.villars.ch, tel: +41 24 495 3232

The refurbished 3/4-star La Renardière is just 200m from the lifts with a great restaurant and bar. See www.larenardiere.ch Northern Dolomites; info@dolomiten-alpin.com, tel: +39 0471 705 343

A week's ski safari starts from 1240Euros. Transfer from / to Bolzano train station or Bergamo airport can be arranged. The trips run every week from mid February until the end of March.

Montafon; www.montafon.at, tel: +43 5556 722530.

Try the family run 3-star Hotel Zimba, Schruns on www.hotel-zimba.at tel: +43 5556 72630. Prices for a twin room, half board, start at 64Euros per head with a 50 or 70 per cent reduction for children. To preview the New Technology Centre (NTC) on Hochjoch, check www.hochjochbahnen.at.

Serfaus; www.serfaus.com, tel: +43 5476 6239

Five-star luxury is available at the Hotel Cervosa www.cervosa.com, tel: +43 5476 6770. If this is full, try the Wellnessresidenz Schalber, tel: +43 5476 6770, www.schalber.com.

FLIGHTS FOR THE WHITE STUFF

You can get to Geneva from Birmingham with British Airways or from both Birmingham and Nottingham East Midlands with bmibaby. Swiss Airlines flies to Zurich from Birmingham; or access Venice Marco Polo via Nottingham East Midlands with easyjet; Friedrichshafen from Stansted or Milan Bergamo from Stansted or Luton with Ryanair. Finally, Austrian Airlines flies three times a week to Innsbruck from Gatwick (via Kings Cross Thameslink).