

GET

LATE BREAKS

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Barcelona

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INGHAMS is offering a seven-night holiday on a half-board basis at the three-star Hotel Avancher & Lodge in Val d'Isère, France, from £1,149 per person. Based on two sharing, the price includes return train travel on the Eurostar from London St. Pancras and resort transfers, departing February 2. To book, visit inghams.co.uk/ski-holidays or call 01483 791 114.



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Wintry wonderland: Seefeld, Austria



Chill out in a luxury mountain paradise

I'm casually treading water in Astoria Resort's heated outdoor infinity pool, face tilted skyward. My eyes are closed, of course, it's a very bright, sunny day. Besides, closing your eyes adds to that air of bliss one must fully adopt at spas.

A rosy glow colours my cheeks. The skin-tingling winter air is probably about 80% responsible for this. The other 20%? Oh, that'll be shameless smug delight. When it's out-and-out pampering you're after, a spa break is the obvious answer. But this is 2019 – 'obvious' just won't cut it. A gorgeous hotel, top-notch facilities and the promise of a just-roll-me-into-bed-afterwards massage are all good, but what about the rest?

We want nature; we want gasp-inducing views, breakfast buffets served with a side of adventure, and bonus points if it's within relatively easy reach. A super-scenic half-hour taxi ride from Innsbruck airport, Astoria fits the bill. Elbows propped on the pool's edge, I run a finger through the snow that's lined the sides and crack an eye to glimpse the mountain peaks zig-zagging the horizon. Now, this is what you call a full spa package... Astoria started life as a family-run business back in 1950, quickly making its mark as one of Austria's

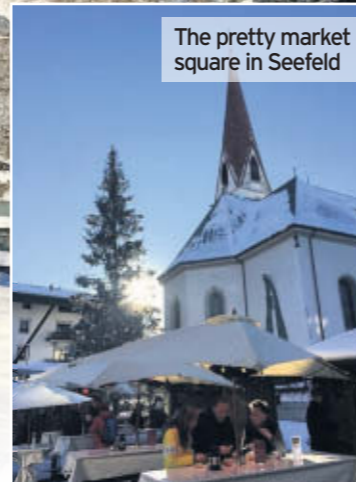
ABI JACKSON visits Austria's Astoria Resort for a wellness fix in the Alps

most modern and glamorous hotels. Its blend of chic luxury, home-from-home comfort and Alpine spirit was a hit, attracting a cool, upmarket crowd. As the resort and travel trends evolved, it's fair to say its appeal has widened. Although now, coming to Astoria for a touch of the high life is perhaps a bit more about its geography. It's perched 1,200m above sea level at the top of Seefeld, a picture-perfect Alpine village slap-bang in the heart of the Austrian Tyrol. The altitude and mountain air are practically a spa treatment in themselves, credited with being a key reason why guests so often proclaim they sleep like logs and leave feeling gloriously revived. That's not to say luxury lounging is out. The resort completed a partial refurb and restyle last year, with current owner Elisabeth Gurtler giving the lobby, bar and lounge area a stunning new look. Still 100% chic, no detail has been spared attention. The interior design involves a colour scheme of deep reds, exposed wood and brown leather. Antlers adorn the ceilings, while candles and a focal-point open fire

flucker invitingly. It looks good, but most importantly, it feels good. The minute I arrive, I instantly want to curl in a corner with a magazine and hot chocolate, phone off and out of sight. The refurb introduced 24 new suites too. Splashing out on the best ones guarantees sprawling living space, panoramic views and tubs with room for two. But my cosy double – complete with mountain-facing balcony, walk-in shower and separate bath, and more sumptu-



Abi Jackson enjoying the cross-country skiing trails in Seefeld



The pretty market square in Seefeld



The Astoria resort boasts a host of spa features including treatment rooms and outdoor pools



ously plump pillows than you could ever possibly need – is ideal. Not that I want to spend too much time in my room, of course... Here for a long weekend, my itinerary is packed, first and foremost with some serious R&R. The spa has also undergone a partial refurb, with further updates in the pipeline. Split into two main areas, one is 'textile-free', meaning strictly no clothes or swimsuits allowed (and yes, it's mixed sexes). The two large swimming pools and outdoor salt-water whirlpool/Jacuzzi are in the textile zone, along with generous lounging areas, daybeds, sauna, steam rooms and treatment rooms. On day one, I stick with the swimsuited section. But much of the modernisation work's taken place in the textile-free area, which includes a sauna with floor-to-ceiling windows offering sweeping views of the Alps, as well as a small outdoor infinity whirlpool. By day two, it's too much to resist and I cast my British prudishness and bikini aside, grab a towel (for hygiene, you must always sit on a towel) and head for that sauna, a 42-square-metre box of bliss. Sun floods in through the glass and, within seconds, I'm utterly engulfed by the heady scent of wood and heat, so absorbed in the moment that my bare flesh matters not a jot. There's an impressive menu of treatments available that are relatively reasonably-priced (from

around £40 for a 25-minute 'Fango Mud Bath For The Back' treatment, while many of the hour-long massage-type treatments come in at under the £100 mark), plus a gym and timetable of classes guests can join in for free. I opt for a shiatsu session (£85 for 50 minutes) with lead therapist Markus who, radiant and calm in equal measure, embodies holistic wellness and mountain-dweller fit. He and his team are passionate believers in proactive good health. Here, a visit to the spa and sauna is just sensible self-care, rather than indulgent pampering – that's the Tyrolean way. A shiatsu virgin, I'm unsure what to expect. Rooted in traditional Chinese and Japanese medicine, it literally means 'finger pressure', and involves lying on a mat while Markus releases blockages in my energy flow via gentle pressing, sweeping motions and some very light joint movement. He tells me I'll feel heat in my skin when the 'unblocking' is working, and he's right, but it's hours later that night and the following morning when I really notice the benefits. I feel like I've had an almighty stretch, all lengthened and smoothed out. My joints, particularly through my spine, feel oiled, somehow. The spa tends to be pretty quiet in the mornings, because many guests head out to make the most of the Alps, one of Mother Nature's best playgrounds. During summer months, there's hiking, mountain biking, cycling and wild swimming to enjoy. In winter, it's all about embracing the snow. With limited time, I forego the lifts and walk into Seefeld for a two-hour cross-country ski lesson. You can book this yourself separately, or Astoria can help with arranging kit hire or an active package deal. Prices vary depending on the number of people and time of year. This is certainly the place to do

HOLIDAY DEALS

ESCAPE PLANS

We select our pick of destinations on offer from travel agents



Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi

■ **UNITED ARAB EMIRATES AND OMAN:** Planet Cruise (planetcruise.co.uk; 0808 278 8504) offers an eight-night fly cruise onboard MSC Cruises' MSC Splendida from £799pp (full-board on cruise), flying from UK (regional supplements available, no supplement from Manchester) on February 26. The cruise includes flights, and stop-offs in Sir Bani Yas Island, Muscat, Khasab and Abu Dhabi.

Manchester Evening News

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