

## Horn of plenty

### FoodAndDrink

Lunch needn't mean  
queueing for spag bol.  
A gourmet ski guide leads  
Sam Wollaston on a tour  
around Zermatt, foodie  
capital of the Alps

**P**icture this. You're sitting at a table on a sunny terrace in the Alps. The Matterhorn looms jagged behind you, like a giant slab of parmesan cheese (honestly, it is like parmesan, in shape and texture - proper crumbly parmesan, not the soapy stuff you get in supermarkets). It's a perfect clear day, snowy peaks puncture the deep Alpine blue sky for as far as the eye can see, an infinite sea of meringue. Glaciers, giant tongues of oozing sugary sorbet, very slowly succumb to gravity. There's something delicious everywhere you look.

Including right here on the table. The lovely smiley waitress brings plates of antipasti (this is the Italian side of the Matterhorn, or Monte Cervino as they call it) - air-dried beef, cheese, cured ham, walnuts and olives. Then steaming plates of spaghetti alle vongole arrive. It's cold out here, but tucked against a south-facing wall in the sunshine, with blankets too, and a delicious lunch to warm the vongole of your heart (yeah I know they're clams, but you know what I mean), it doesn't feel cold at all. Another glass of tourette-superior? (This wine makes you swear involuntarily, in Italian - "va fanculo!") Oh go on then. Just one problem; the ski home.

Home - for three days anyway - is Zermatt, the famous old resort on the Swiss side of the Matterhorn. I'm here

because I like skiing, and I like eating, and Zermatt is a paradise for both. Because it links up with Cervinia in Italy, there are runs - over 300km of them - to amuse an intermediate skier for weeks, plus plenty of adventurous off-piste stuff for nutters. And when you've worked up an appetite, Zermatt is the foodie capital of the Alps. I'm not talking about smart restaurants in town, of which there are plenty too; I'm talking little places on the slopes to stop for lunch. Gourmet-skiing . . . mmm, it sounds like a combination made in heaven, like champagne-sex-chocolate. And so it's turning out to be.

Helping me to find my way to these places, and to find my way round the menus, and to find my way home after a boozy lunch is "gourmet ski guide" Donald Scott, of smart Zermatt chalet company [Mountain Exposure](#). Expert skier, expert foodie, expert winer, Donald is an old-school enthusiast of old-school good living. He's been skiing and eating and drinking wine in Zermatt forever, and is greeted warmly in every restaurant and bar we enter, and often on the slopes as well. Soon I'm imagining that all these people are actually my friends too - I'm in the loop.

I'm also staying in one of [Mountain Exposure](#)'s chalets, so posh the tiles on the bathroom floor are heated - I went to sleep almost hoping I'd have to go at

some point in the night. The last time I went skiing I slept in a bunk bed.

So lunch number one is the spaghetti alle vongole at **Chalet Etoile** over the border in Italy, a red run down from Kleine Matterhorn, at 3,883m the highest lift in the area. On day

two the weather has closed in, so we lunch nearer to home, at a cosy little place called **Zum See** (zumsee.ch), which is just a few hundred metres from Zermatt. Sweetbreads with morel cream sauce and noodles washed down with a very washdownable merlot. And because there's a blizzard outside there's no excuse not to have pudding - strudel with vanilla sauce. And then a thing called a *grolla*, a multi-spouted wooden teapot, with something lethal and hot inside - coffee mixed with grappa and genepy, and Lord knows what else. It gets passed round like a joint and does the same kind of thing to your head. The ski home afterwards is a total grolla-blizzard-blur. Luckily it isn't far, a gentle blue run back to Zermatt, and I've got the gourmet ski guide with me. Can you get done for drunk skiing, I wonder?

## **Gourmet-skiing is a combination made in heaven, like 'champagne-sex-chocolate'**

And then on day three, the best of all: risotto with ceps and shavings of white truffle at a place called **Chez Vrony** (chezvrony.ch) on the Rothorn mountain. And a bottle of dézaley from grapes grown on the terraces above Lake Geneva. There's even a lady - let's call her Heidi - in some kind of traditional Swiss costume. Does life get any better?

I've done a bit of skiing before. And lunch has never been anything like this. It's either meant a shivery picnic on the slopes - fumbling for frozen cheese in mittens, your lips sticking to

the freezing water bottle, that kind of thing. Or it's involved queuing with a tray for spag bol and a little bottle of red for €20 (about £56) at one of those self-service places. Zermatt, with its dozens of fantastic little restaurants on the slopes, is a whole new experience.

These places range in price from reasonable to expensive. Sweetbreads at Zum See are £25, the truffle risotto at Chez Vrony is £30, or risotto with ceps and blueberries a more reasonable £18. Spagetti alle vongole at Chalet Etoile is a snip at £12. No, they aren't dirt cheap, but compared to the self-service spag bol places, nor are they outrageously expensive. And you wouldn't want to go gourmet every day - the elastic on your salopettes may complain, as well as your bank manager. And it does pretty much rule out any meaningful skiing in the afternoon.

OK, so here's my lunching solution for a week's skiing in Zermatt. Skip the self-service spag bol places altogether - who needs them? Do the shivery picnics - lovely local air-dried beef, cheese, a cheeky bar of Suchard - with a couple of hot chocolate stops to warm up. And then for two days, the worst two weather-wise, go gourmet. You need to book, so maybe it's best to hire the gourmet ski guide. But then there's the question of whether to go vongole, sweetbreads, or truffles? OK, so maybe you need three gourmet days. And there are many, many more restaurants. It's so hard. Perhaps you should just hope the weather's so bad you can't ski at all, then you can spend everything that you would have spent on equipment hire and tedious stuff like that on food. Mmmmm. That's it. Problem solved.