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## LUXURY HOMES

Volume 2 | Issue 6

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## ST. MORITZ: SWITZERLAND'S WINTER WONDERLAND

By: Joseph Reaney

**I**t all began with a wager. In September 1864, St. Moritz hotelier Johannes Badrutt bet four hotel guests that if they returned to the town in winter, they would enjoy it even more than in summer. If he was right, they should stay with him for as long as they wished; and if not, he would cover the costs of their travel and stay.

Naturally, the bet was won. The guests were delighted by the spectacular snow-capped peaks, the day-long sunshine and the unique Alpine activities. They stayed until spring, before returning home to inform all their friends. With that, St. Moritz had

its reputation as the first and finest winter holiday destination in the Alps.

From the moment you enter the lobby of the Kulm Hotel, the heritage is plain to see. A carpeted marble staircase leads up to a vast public space, replete with lavishly-upholstered armchairs, a roaring antique fireplace and rich tapestries on the walls and pillars. And sunshine, oozing through the lake-facing windows.

This was the place: the venue for a wager that would give birth to St. Moritz's long-standing status as a true winter wonderland. Almost a century-and-a-half later, Badrutt's

baby remains at the very peak of the town's many five-star accommodation options – so where better to use as a base to discover the surrounding area?

But first, to the room. The spacious suites are slathered in stunning Swiss pine, with warm-colored carpets, curtains and bedspreads and a sparkling marble bathroom. But what really makes it is the view. Expansive windows reveal a stunning panorama; the winter sun peaking out over the snowy Engadine mountains, and shining down on the lake. It is a spectacular sight; one that makes you want to immediately venture outside.







## DEPARTURES



The first thing to do here is explore the town. As a result of Badrutt's bet, St. Moritz has spent the last 150 years expanding into the ultimate luxury winter destination, packed with luxury highlights. Aside from the other five-star hotels – some of which were also pioneered by the Badrutt family – the town also boasts a wealth of high-end shopping (from haute couture boutiques to decadent chocolatiers), fine dining and entertainment (including the super-exclusive Dracula Club), and stunning architectural sights (from the 12th century Leaning Tower to the Segantini Museum). Yet the real heart of this Alpine town is its glistening lake.

During summer, Lake St. Moritz is a popular haunt for swimmers, sailors and parasailers, but during winter it has an even more important purpose. First and foremost, the frozen lake becomes the town's ice rink, open to locals and visitors alike while the sun's up. But the ice also becomes a venue for winter sporting events, ranging from cricket matches to golf tournaments to horse polo competitions. It also marks the end of the famous Cresta Run, which starts opposite the Kulm Hotel. Spectators gather around the lake to watch all the events taking place throughout the season; or watch through the wide windows of the Kulm's warm lounge.

Then there are the mountains. St. Moritz is surrounded on all sides by high peaks – the highest, Piz Bernina, stands close to 13,300 feet – and consequently boasts some of the best skiing and snowboarding in Europe. There are more than 220 miles of pristine white slopes surrounding the town, with funiculars and cable cars spread across the valley. With several snow schools around, it's an ideal place to learn or perfect your skiing.

Visit out of season, and those same peaks offer more than 360 miles of hiking trails, and hundreds more miles of cycling routes. And if you pay to stay in the town more than two nights, the cable cars are included.





With so much to do during winter, it's easy to see why Badrutt won his bet. But when it comes to why those guests decided to stay for the entire season, perhaps the answer lies not with the town... but with his hotel.

Venture beyond the public lobby and fine rooms at the Kulm Hotel and you will find a host of other charms. There are the restaurants and bars, which vary from the six-course extravaganzas in the elegant Le Grand Restaurants to the informal Swiss specialties in the al fresco Chesa Parc. There are the luxury features, from the 19th century nine-hole golf course beside the hotel to the brand new spa

and wellness center (take an underwater swim accompanied by music in the large pool, before enjoying an Alpine Herb Stamp massage). And there are the range of cultural events that have always been a trademark of the hotel, from opera and music festivals to art exhibitions and sporting events. Nobody could be bored with a winter stay in the Kulm.

It all began with a wager: that St. Moritz is even more fun in winter than summer. One thing is for sure: if we had to bet on where the rich and powerful will be spending this Christmas, our money is on the Kulm Hotel.

**The Kulm Hotel is St. Moritz's most luxurious accommodation option. Rooms start from around \$425 per night this winter, with a minimum stay of 12 days over the festive period. Visit [www.kulm.com](http://www.kulm.com) for more information about this celebrated hotel. You can also discover more about St. Moritz at [www.stmoritz.ch](http://www.stmoritz.ch).**