

Samnaun – a skiing area sets standards for decades

Standard text

Samnaun in the very east of Switzerland is the centre of attraction for ski and snow sport fans: the Silvretta Ski Arena Samnaun/Ischgl is one of the largest and most popular ski areas in the Alps. The cross-border holiday paradise with guaranteed snow from November to May is constantly setting new standards in skiing: for decades, consistent investments have been made in the infrastructure. Samnaun also offers holiday experiences in a cultivated atmosphere beside the pistes. The only duty-free paradise in Switzerland allows for enjoyable shopping in the middle of the impressive mountain scenery. The family tradition of the accommodation establishments, extraordinary personalities and the special geographical location make Samnaun what it is: a unique little spot of Switzerland.

Already the arrival is an experience

«The way is the goal», this is especially true for the spectacular journey to Samnaun. Coming from the Lower Engadine, one drives in Martina past the Swiss customs, «into» the Inn gorge, where the Inn is now dammed at the river power station. Only a few metres before the Swiss-Austrian border at Vinadi the Samnaun road branches off to the left in order to quickly gain height and lead into the lowest side valley of the Engadine – the Samnaun valley. On a few kilometres one gains a good 800 metres in altitude, the climate and the landscape becomes increasingly high alpine during the journey.

The feeder road as a lifeline for tourism

The route of the Samnaun Road has remained for long stretches the same as when it was opened in 1912, and with the opening up of the road more and more guests came to Samnaun, so that inns were soon being built. In the 1950s the first ski lifts were built, and the Tourism Board was founded. From 1978 the unique winter success story of the international Silvretta Ski-Arena Samnaun/Ischgl began with the construction of the aerial cableway to the Alp Trider Sattel and the connecting lifts to the Viderjoch, making the connection to Ischgl possible. As the capacity of the feeder cableway soon became insufficient, the world's first double-decker cableway with a capacity of 180 people was opened in 1995. Regular investments are made in the renewal and expansion of the facilities in the ski area, so that Samnaun/Ischgl sets the standards in winter sports: guaranteed snow reliability, perfect piste conditions, high ride comfort with the modern transport facilities and skiing enjoyment without waiting times.

Unlimited piste pleasure and a clear promise

Samnaun vouches for snow sports enthusiasts with a clear promise: The international Silvretta Arena Samnaun/Ischgl is one of the best skiing areas in the Alps and offers boundless piste pleasure on 239 kilometres of piste in Switzerland and Austria. 45 modern transport facilities transport up to 96,000 winter sports enthusiasts per hour. In the high season, up to 20,000 winter sports enthusiasts visit the ski area every day. Snow reliability is guaranteed from the end of November to the beginning of May thanks to the altitude at 1800 to 2800 metres above sea level and the approximately 1150 snow generators. 95 percent of the slopes can be covered with snow if required. Samnaun has one of the longest winter seasons in the Alps with about 160 days – where else does winter last half a year?



The choice of pistes leaves nothing to be desired: From the highest point in the ski area, the Greitspitz at 2872 metres above sea level, winter sports enthusiasts have a choice of eight different pistes. The ski area is impressive in its size and yet astonishingly compact: from each point the winter sports enthusiast can get back to the starting point with a maximum of three lift rides.

The international cooperation with the Tyrolean partner, the Silvrettaseilbahnen in Ischgl, has been a successful symbiosis right from the start – since the opening of the ski connection in 1978: No dividends are paid to the exclusively local shareholders of the two cable car companies; instead, the income generated is consistently invested in modernisation and increased comfort. In Samnaun and Ischgl the standards in winter sports are set. The Silvretta Ski Arena Samnaun/Ischgl operates from a position of strength and with optimal conditions for the sustainable and far-sighted further development of the ski destination.

With far-reaching positive consequences for the guest: after all, the excellent price-performance ratio in Samnaun is convincing in all areas, whether it be the ski pass, duty-free shopping or even accommodation and catering. The large number of positive reviews on the booking portal Booking.com, which named Samnaun the most hospitable place in Switzerland in 2023, also testifies to this.

Events at the highest level

In spring, the combination of skiing on top-prepared slopes and enjoying the pleasant spring temperatures on one of the large sun terraces is particularly popular. From April until the end of the season, four concert highlights are held each year. Special from Samnaun's point of view is the Spring Snow Festival on the Alp Trida, the concert with an internationally renowned music star. Already at the season opening the opening concert takes place in Samnaun village.

Samnaun stands for snow sports competence. This positioning is underlined by the annual winter sports events: At the International Silvretta Pupils' Cup, Europe's up-and-coming skiers compete with around 800 children and young people in the giant slalom and ski cross disciplines. At the European Formation Championships, the best ski formation teams meet annually in Samnaun to close the season.

The Samnaun guests also celebrate the summer season at the various event highlights: At the «Gipfelgenuss – the festival of culinary delights» Samnaun restaurateurs show their skills at 2500 m above sea level in the Panorama Restaurant Sattel. The visitors can not only taste the signature appetizers of the Samnaun chefs but also enjoy exquisite sparkling wine coffees. The Swiss national holiday on 1st August is celebrated with a village market and numerous attractions for young and old – be it a helicopter flight over the Samnaun mountain scenery or the presentation of the Samnaun fire brigade – as well as the ceremonial speech of an often internationally known personality.

Unique in Switzerland: duty-free paradise Samnaun

Samnaun has been the only duty-free paradise in Switzerland since 1892. With the founding of the modern federal state in 1848 the national border was defined as a customs border. The only way to Samnaun led from Pfunds via Spiss in Austria. Therefore, the Samnaun people had no access to the domestic market and had to pay customs for all goods at the border. With the opening of the Samnaunerstrasse in 1912 this disadvantage ceased to exist, Samnaun has nevertheless remained duty-free to this day. Before in the 1960s winter sports became an important economic sector in the two Tyrolean neighbouring villages of Ischgl and Serfaus, smuggling goods over the mountain passes was a very popular source of income. Coffee, rice, flour, tobacco, saccharin (sweetener), spices or women's stockings were smuggled. The smuggling was physically demanding: a filled rucksack weighed up to 40 kilograms.

Today duty-free shopping is considerably less strenuous: Samnaun guests can choose from hundreds of brands in the around 40 duty-free shops: In Samnaun you can buy fine spirits, exclusive cosmetics or high-quality sports articles at attractive duty-free prices. Rarities can also be discovered here: in order to track them down, head salesman Mathias Leipold travels several times a year to the perfume capital of Grasse in Provence. He has the right nose for the «perfect match» of personality and matching fragrance. «If the fragrance has been well chosen, it smells like a second skin, all cuddly,» says Mathias Leipold. The most exclusive brands are only available in a few places in the world – but definitely in Samnaun.

In comparison to duty-free shops in airports, Samnaun captivates with its alpine atmosphere at one of the highest shopping miles in Europe at 1800 m above sea level. The shopping experience is complemented by cosy restaurants that invite you to stay in style. By the way, the shops are open daily.

Culinary highlights

The high class Samnaun gastronomy unites the best influences of Austrian, Italian and Swiss cuisine in the border triangle. For example Bernd Fabian in the Hotel Chasa Montana with a Michelin star or Daniel and Horst Homann in the Hotel Homann offer a very special palate experience. The local dairy products from the Samnauner Sennerei or the Samnauner nut cake from the Rechsteiner bakery are popular souvenirs. Thanks to the family hospitality in the exclusively family-run accommodation establishments, Samnaun has the most satisfied guests in Switzerland, as the evaluation of guest evaluations shows.

High up: Samnaun summer inspires

Thanks to the «All Inclusive» guest card, guests benefit from numerous free services in summer from the very first overnight stay: Both the use of all mountain railways up to Ischgl and entry to the Alpenquell Adventure Pool including sauna world or participation in the guest programme, for example on the guided hikes or a guided tour in the valley museum, are free. The public buses in the Samnaun valley can be used by all guests all year round free of charge.

Thanks to the pleasantly cool nights in the Samnaun high valley one can escape the summery sultriness in the lowlands. Even during the day the temperatures hardly ever rise above 25 degrees and are therefore just right for a hike: from the leisurely fairytale path with Murmina and Murmin for families to the demanding alpine route over the Bürkelkopf (3030 m above sea level), there is something for every taste. One of the highest hikes in the Alps leads to the Samnaun local mountain Muttler (3296 m above sea level). Samnaun is known for its rich variety of plants with about 900 different species of plants between 1400 and 3300 m above sea level. Some plants grow in Switzerland exclusively in Samnaun, for example the healing bell. Edelweiss can also be found here in large numbers, some of them even directly along the road.

If the children don't want to go on a hike, there is the Family Climbing and Bouldering Park on the Alp Trida: the simple combination of clambering on the climbing rocks, playing in the mountain stream and a grilled sausage from the fireplace delights the children. The wooden ball track is located on the Alptrider Sattel, and time passes in a flash for the whole family. Wooden balls can be purchased directly at the restaurant. The disc golf course in Samnaun village has 18 holes. Discgolf is a game with Frisbee. The aim of disc golf is to hit the target basket with as few throws as possible with the Frisbee from the tee. Frisbees can be borrowed free of charge from the guest information office and the sports shops and sponsors.

There are about 80 kilometres of mountain bike trails in Samnaun valley. These connect the valley with the neighbouring valleys in the Paznaun in the north and over the Fimber Pass with the Engadine in the south. There is a choice of different trails with different levels of difficulty from the challenging

uphill ride to the Greitspitz (2870 m above sea level) to the lively freeride trail with tight curves and smaller jumps on the Alp Trida.

Incidentally, every morning during the summer months the first rays of Swiss sunshine hit the Grübelekopf (2892 m above sea level), in the very east of Helvetia.

Over 1200 years of immigration history: The best of both

Samnaun was settled around the year 800 from the Engadin. The population in the Lower Engadin grew, the agricultural area was no longer sufficient for supply. Therefore, the farmers drove the herds of cows over the passes into Samnaun valley. From the year 1200 the first farmers settled in Samnaun valley. In the 16th century the Reformation also covered Samnaun and the Lower Engadin. Samnaun, however, decided by a majority to remain Catholic like the neighbouring Tyrol, while the Lower Engadine was reformed. When the Samnaun people were in search of a priest or teacher, these rather came from the neighbouring Tyrol. This is one of the reasons why a Tyrolean dialect is spoken in Samnaun today. The 700 Samnauner are with their dialect the smallest linguistic minority in Switzerland. The predominantly Rhaeto-Romanic field names bear witness to the cultural origin of the Samnaun valley.

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About TESSVM

TESSVM is the tourist marketing organisation for the Lower Engadine, Samnaun and Val Müstair. On behalf of the shareholders, TESSVM primarily promotes the demand for tourist offers and services both nationally and internationally. TESSVM and all local stakeholders are responsible for the communication of offers and guest care in five political communities with over twenty holiday resorts. The organisation with its headquarters in Scuol launches and coordinates joint projects with regional partners and service providers and ensures coordination with Graubünden Ferien and Switzerland Tourism. With a budget of approximately CHF 5.5 million, the company employs around 40 full- and part-time staff, including one intern and three apprentices. The Engadin Samnaun Val Müstair holiday region contributes around 1 million overnight stays, which is almost 10 % of the total number of overnight stays in Graubünden.

Taking responsibility: CSR and three-dimensional sustainability

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is the voluntary contribution of companies to sustainable development, with voluntary commitment at its core. TESSVM acts according to the principle of three-dimensional sustainability: economic, social and environmental. TESSVM is "climate-neutral" by striving to reduce its CO₂ emissions and offsetting unavoidable emissions through myclimate carbon offset projects. Wherever possible, purchases are made in the region and orders are placed with local partners. Within the company itself, TESSVM promotes young talent with apprenticeships and internships.