

A resort with quite the story to tell

HILS EVERITT discovers Davos' literary links of the past, as well as its place in hosting discussions to combat climate change for the future

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is famous for writing the Sherlock Holmes books, but did you know that he introduced Davos as a ski destination to the world? He, therefore, unconsciously helped in creating an iconic resort that is now known to millions all over the world – even non skiers, as the glamorous World Economic Forum venue.

That event is now closely associated with the important and relevant issue of climate change. This, of course, is a topic very much in the minds of many ski resorts these days as they try to improve their environmental impact, as well as deal with the consequences of warmer temperatures and erratic weather.

This was impressively illustrated on my visit to Davos and neighbouring Klosters in late March. We'd skied in the extremes, from total whiteout and blizzards in deep snow on tricky steep blacks in Klosters, to buzzing around the fast, wide, red Davos pistes in blistering hot, glorious sunshine. As well as tackling these extremes, I was also admiring the, at present, redundant snow cannon, with their more-environmentally-friendly technology.

When the lifts finally shut it was time to discover more about the resort's fascinating

history and its literary connections. And Davos is full of them.

My first stop was to be whisked up a funicular train to the Hotel Schatzalp, formerly the town's famous sanatorium at Weissfluhgipfel. This place put Davos and, subsequently, close neighbour, the more rustic Klosters, on the Alpine map. In those days the thinking was that fresh mountain air was highly beneficial, so the Schatzalp sanatorium had been built to establish the town as a centre for restorative health.

The view from the terrace is stunning and that alone would improve anyone's well-being in an instant. It's a beautiful old building that is now a smart hotel, but does also cater for the more budget conscious with rooms available from SWFR80. Yes, Davos can be done without pots of cash.

This hotel has another major, notable connection in that it is the inspiration for a famous novel, 'The Magic Mountain' by German author Thomas Mann. The story takes place in an exclusive tuberculosis sanatorium in the Swiss Alps just before the First World War – providing another famous literary connection.

Our own Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's love of Davos started in 1896 when his wife Louisa fell ill with tuberculosis. Conan Doyle had heard of the sanatorium so took Louisa there and subsequently his sisters. By then Davos had become a popular ski resort for the Swiss, and, as a keen skier, Doyle fell in love with the place.

He wrote about it in an Alpine newspaper and that article led to the Brits embracing the resort. Sir Arthur was also a keen golfer and was the first person to play golf here; he also tackled the famous, but difficult, off piste route to Arosa guided by the Bengen brothers (still a great challenge today); played ice hockey; started toboggan and bobsleigh in Davos; and became great friends with Dr Carl Spengler who built the first hotel, the Curhouse, now Hotel Europe.

There are a number of other notable firsts. Davos was home to the ski jumper Andreas Dascher who first adopted the drop/fish style where the arms are stretched out behind you, and the first T-bar ski lift in the world was built here opening on Christmas Eve 1934. The Bolgen lift was designed and built by Swiss engineer Ernst Constanm Gustav to save skiers hiking up the hill and eating into their lesson time. Davos was also where the modern toboggan was first designed and mass-produced.

Conan Doyle's friend Spengler is honoured by the town by giving his name to the famous Ice Hockey competition. The Spengler Cup celebrated its 100th anniversary in the 2024 season. I was treated to a brilliant night at the ice hockey stadium to watch Davos play in the National play-offs against Lausanne. It was a cracking match – so fast and exciting and you can follow the puck at all times, unlike on TV. I highly recommend it for anyone skiing in Davos during the hockey season.

Climate change has affected the ice hockey team, too. The original ice rink was outdoors, but it had to close in 2016 due to the temperature increasing. This meant it couldn't be maintained at the correct temperature to be viable. The new indoor facility is superb, but it is sad that there is yet another aspect of this global issue that has significant consequences.

Davos and Klosters are taking this issue incredibly seriously. Davos has a particular need to show its commitment as the host

of the World Economic Forum since 1971. The 2024 event, held in January, naturally, included climate change on its agenda.

January is a quieter month on the slopes generally, but the Davos slopes are particularly empty due to the Forum's presence. That means it is a great time to ski here – if you can book a hotel room early enough, that is. With 50 Heads of State, political/religious leaders and various leading academics, industrialists and the media, plus their entourages descending on the town, I suggest you book early...

AUSTRIA: Hochgurgl

In November 2024, the picturesque Hochgurgl in the Ötztal Valley, Austrian Tirol, will once again host the FIS Ski World Cup, featuring both ladies' and men's slalom events. This marks the second time the resort has welcomed such prestigious competitions. Following the season opener in nearby Sölden, the world's top alpine skiers will face the challenging Kirchenkarpiste course in Hochgurgl. The women's slalom will take place on Saturday 23 November, followed by the men's slalom on Sunday 24 November. Spectators can enjoy the thrilling races and support their favourite skiers from the finish area at Top Mountain Crosspoint.

tyrol.com

AUSTRIA: SkiWelt

This year, the SkiWelt mountain railway companies are investing over 27 million euros to make the ski area even more modern and sustainable and to offer new services. The new 8-seater Eibergbahn is being built on the same route as the previous and, with a dynamic transport capacity of up to 4,570 passengers per hour, will be the world's most powerful detachable chairlift. A centrepiece of the new Eibergbahn will be the new 140kWp PV system on the roof of the valley station of the Eibergbahn. This will enable around 50% of the annual energy required to be generated by the cable car itself.

skiwelt.at/neuerungen

FRANCE

This year Ski France has added three new premium Contactless Catered Chalets to its

portfolio. Introduced as a new concept in 2021, Ski France's contactless catering has been a hit, with bookings up 25% over the last six months compared to the same period last year. Ski France now offers a range of contactless catered chalets across the French Alps in popular resorts such as Val d'Isère, Méribel, La Tania, and Alpe d'Huez. These chalets include quality food and drink, afternoon tea, snacks, delicious dinners, a selection of drinks with unlimited wine and a generous supply of beer. All delivered with contactless service.
skifrance.co.uk

FRANCE: Chamonix

Launched in 2021, La Trace des Grands is a ski mountaineering race taking place on the Grands-Montets site. A choice of three races allows the expression of all forms of ski touring. This season it will be taking place on 8 and 9 March 2025.
latracedesgrands.com

FRANCE: La Plagne

A brand new event is promising to shake things up at **La Plagne** from 14-19 April 2025. La Mega Bell Course is a race series designed to thrill skiers of all ages. This unique competition combines fun, creativity, and challenge across five wacky races that will test the skills of even the most seasoned skiers. Competitors have two strategies to choose from: embrace the chaos with total improvisation on Saturday or take a more tactical approach by practicing on the timed courses available from Monday to Friday, each one unveiled day by day.
en.la-plagne.com

FRANCE: Les Gets

If you are looking for an unusual experience then why not spend a night under the stars at the Chéry Dôme? Comfortably equipped with electricity, wifi, en-suite facilities and an outdoor brazier to warm your hands while gazing at the stars, it is set in the middle of a snow-covered field, and can accommodate between 2 and 7 members of the same group or family. In the kitchen, you can enjoy dishes prepared using summer crops from the garden and locally-grown produce.
Cherydome.com

FRANCE: Meribel

Fast Tracks, the early risers' offer, providing the chance to make the first run of the day, is back in Meribel after a two-year break. This season, First Tracks will take place in the Saulire area of the resort, starting with a nutrient-packed breakfast at La Folie Douce. These sessions offer a great way to beat the crowds, starting the day on untracked pistes in the fresh mountain air while the rest of the resort sleeps.
meribel.net/en

FRANCE: Tignes

The 4th edition of Mountain shaker will be taking place from 8-16 March 2025. The event will be showcasing the best of freestyle and board culture including a stage of Big Air Ski World Cup, Slopestyle Ski World Cup and Freeride World Tour Qualifiers. The entertainment will be ongoing throughout the week, featuring live music, prominent DJs and the best of street art in the mountains.
en.tignes.net

FRANCE: Val d'Isère, Courchevel, Méribel and Megève

September saw the launch of Peak Retreat's sister company Ski Collection, a new, curated collection of chalets that represent the ultimate in alpine luxury. Ski Collection has assembled the very best chalets in a small, hand-picked selection of illustrious, world-class, French resorts, that its team know intimately. Ski Collection can curate all aspects of guests' holidays, from travel by private jet and helicopter transfers, to individualised ski tuition, guided ski adventures, après and dining experiences.
skicollection.com

SWITZERLAND: Davos

From 13-15 December 2024, the FIS Cross-Country World Cup will celebrate its 50th anniversary in Davos – expect surprises and experience world-class cross-country skiing at the heart of the town.
davosnordic.ch/en

SWITZERLAND: Saas-Fee

The Metro Alpin in Saas-Fee, the highest underground funicular in the world, leading to the world's highest revolving restaurant, has just been extensively modernised, guaranteeing a swift and comfortable transit between the Felskinn and Mittelallalin stations in just 4.5 minutes. The new carriages accommodate up to 95 people, and the stations now boast new platform doors to make boarding and disembarking easier and reduce waiting times.
saas-fee.ch/en

SWITZERLAND: Verbier

In their 32nd year, Mountain Beds continue to find great Verbier properties for their

clients. As well as high-end properties, the vast network of their connections means they can find surprisingly affordable options too. Mountain Beds are also increasing their portfolio in connected resorts such as La Tzoumaz, Le Chable, Nendaz and Les Collons. They have lots of properties available for a Christmas break, including Sabrina, a fabulous 3-bedroom family home beside the Medran lift in Verbier (21-28 December, sleeps up to 6 people); Skye, with 5 bedrooms in Verbier (21-28 December, sleeps up to 10 people); and Skyfall with 5 bedrooms in La Tzoumaz (20-27 December, sleeps up to 12 people).
mountainbeds.com

USA: Aspen Snowmass

Aspen Snowmass has secured three premier events in park and halfpipe snowsports for the 2024-25 season: X Games, Toyota U.S. Grand Prix and the all-new Snow League – all of which will be hosted at Buttermilk Mountain this winter. Hosting these three world-class events signifies the biggest season of slopestyle, park and pipe competitions Aspen Snowmass has ever seen.
aspensnowmass.com/visit/events

USA: Ikon Pass

Sierra-at-Tahoe in California is joining Ikon Pass for winter 24/25. The closest mountain destination to Sacramento and the Bay Area, Sierra-at-Tahoe is located just 12 miles from South Lake Tahoe. Known for its

welcoming vibe, sculpted learning terrain, and amphitheater-style terrain parks, and South Lake Tahoe's only Halfpipe, Sierra-at-Tahoe averages 400+ inches of snowfall a year. Also new for winter 24/25, Taos Ski Area in New Mexico will now be available on the Ikon Base Pass. ikonpass.com/en/shop-passes





