

White Silence & Winter Whispers

Europe's Fairytale Season

Switzerland's Winter Stillness - Where Elegance Meets Quietude

The curtain has risen on Europe, unveiling one of its most spectacular performances: Winter, also known as the Fairytale Season. As the year comes to its conclusion and the magical stillness sets in, the authentic charm of this land is revealed, then softly enveloped in thick blankets of snow. This is not a season of noise but of simple charms, refined energy and profound serenity, which turns the ordinary into the exquisite, and the incredible into the sublime.

From sipping hot chocolate in a cozy wooden cabin in the Swiss Alps to walking down the glittering streets of Vienna during Christmas, elegance and grace are imbued in every corner.

SWITZERLAND The Art of Stillness in Lucerne

Step into Lucerne and experience how the modern world politely fades away, yielding to a timeless charm and quietude that takes hold. Here, mornings greet you with panoramic views of snow-covered alpine peaks right from the hotel window. The atmosphere, though chilly, carries a profound nostalgia, instantly linking you to the serene wonder of a long-lost childhood fairytale. The day unfolds with a gentle walk across the iconic Kapellbrücke, a true symbol of the city's compelling heritage and unwavering resilience. Afternoons are reserved for experiencing the beauty and serenity of Lake Lucerne, as you stroll the promenades, wrapped in warm woolen attire. With the right timing, you can even catch the fleeting, breathtaking cameo of the sunset by the lakeside.

Evenings invite exploration of the festively lit Old Town alleyways, with a choice of shopping for handmade souvenirs at the local Christmas markets or sipping hot beverages while enjoying local events. For more laid-back fun, there are delectable chocolate and cheese tasting tours to enrich your itinerary. Winter in Lucerne, Switzerland, is not just a season but an enchanting experience.

MINI STORIES

AUSTRIA

Explore the Tunes and Beauty of Salzburg

Salzburg, in Austria, transforms into a remarkable winter wonderland. The Old Town is draped in a joyous splendor of fairy lights and watched over by the Hohensalzburg Fortress, the iconic sentinel stone. Amidst the orchestral stillness of the freezing air, the cozy cafes invite patrons in for a warm beverage and friendly conversation. Beyond its visual beauty, there lies a deep soul and rich culture waiting to be explored. Nicknamed the city of Mozart, the legacy of this timeless classical composer is kept alive by museums, concerts and the annual Mozart Festival.

FRANCE

Paris, Where Art Meets the Palate

The refined hush of winter directs attention to the sophisticated experiences and exquisite cuisine of Paris. Spend your day strolling the romantic Champs-Élysées, shop at luxury boutiques and soak in culture with a side of French theatrical performances. Conclude the walk with the monumental sight of the Arc de Triomphe, a must-visit spectacle glistening in the soft winter light. At the end of the expedition, find respite in a classic Parisian café, where connoisseurs can savor the world-renowned French pastries and special breads. Whether it's enjoying the simplicity of Pain d'épices or a hearty delight of Poulet rôti, the conclusion to your day will be one of complete culinary satisfaction.

NORWAY

Northern Lights in Tromsø

Embrace the calmness of Arctic Norway in Tromsø as it prepares for a sensational, celestial drama. With the sky as the canvas and the serene atmosphere as the choir, witness the glimmering curtain of Northern Lights dancing to the rhythm composed by Mother Nature. The hues of violet and emerald in the night sky feel ethereal as seen from the comfort of a private glass cabin cocoon. On the return trip, a slight detour will take you to a nearby Alaskan husky farm, where you can explore Sami culture and go for dog sledding.

ITALY

An Ensemble of Architectural and Historical Brilliance

The receding crowds of Italian winter unlock its true artistic glamour. Grasp a fragment of its incredible historical heritage in Rome, Venice and Florence, the iconic trinity. The sparsely populated streets and calmer winter ambience allow one to feel like the sole custodian of history, claiming wonders like the Colosseum, Roman Forum, and Pantheon for oneself. Venice emerges with its intriguing buildings, celebrated piazzas and intricate canals, all contributing to an alluring yet fragile beauty, garnished in the elegance of winter romance. Here, immerse yourself in the authentic Italian cultural experiences, from flamboyant opera nights to one-of-a-kind carnival celebrations. Florence chimes in with its artistic Renaissance masterpieces, its scenic beauty, and its rich gastronomic diversity.

CHRISTMAS MARKETS

The Festive Splendor

Embark on a journey through the heart of Europe in winter and explore the traditional Christmas markets, which stay dazzling until the dawn of the New Year. Nuremberg's Old Town awakens under the festive glow. Traditional stalls with their red-and-white-striped roofs create a celebratory ambience across the market square. While scouting for souvenirs at this market, don't forget to get a taste of the famous Nuremberg gingerbread. The Christmas markets of Vienna take the Christmas spirit to a spectacular level. Experience their unparalleled festive vibe, where countless fairy lights weave a glowing canopy. To warm your hands and holiday heart, grab a cup of hot chocolate and roasted chestnuts.


During the chilly winter nights, bask in the soulful warmth of the Christmas market in Prague's Old Town Square. The Gothic architecture serves as a timeless backdrop for the brightly lit market with its pastoral wooden stalls. Among the offerings, the handmade ornaments and delicious festive treats, like doughnuts, dumplings and pancakes, steal the show. Strasbourg also hosts a constellation of Christmas markets across the city, offering a seamless fusion of German and French holiday traditions. At night, scour paths lined with hundreds of stalls and immortalize the visit with pictures in front of the illuminated Great Christmas Tree on Place Kléber. The Christmas markets in Budapest have also earned quite a lot of fame worldwide, with the main market centered on Vörösmarty Square. Expect to see small wooden stalls, lit with fairy lights, selling handmade toys, leather goods, and ceramics. Indulge in local favourites like sweet chimney cakes and hearty Töltött káposzta, perfect when the appetite strikes.

From immersing yourself in the grandeur of the Swiss Alps to exploring the iconic Christmas markets, experiencing Europe in winter is truly mesmerizing. The season unveils an ethereal blend of enchanting beauty and unparalleled serenity. Europe in winter is not just a destination but a masterpiece of stillness serving as the backdrop of your own fairy tale. Europe is best experienced with SOTC, India's Favourite Travel Partner.

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SWITZERLAND



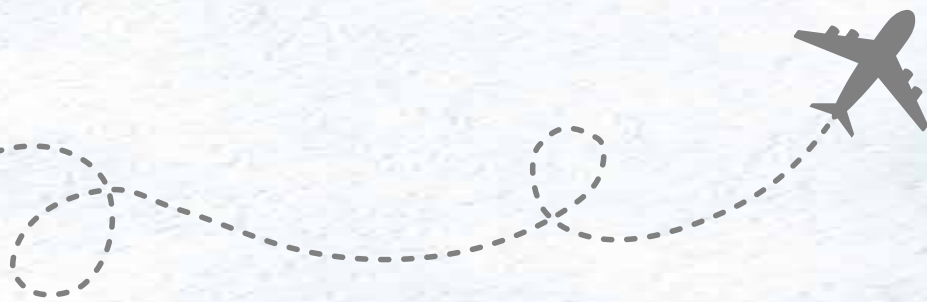
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Switzerland's Winter Stillness

Where Elegance Meets Quietude



Step away from the fast-flowing world and find luxury in the stillness of winter in Switzerland. As the fresh snow starts to cover the dramatic Swiss landscapes, the region's true beauty is revealed. The colossal peaks sculpted in white silence stand as timeless sentinels to the Alpine towns. This is where you will find a powerful contrast between the grandeur of nature's beauty and serenity.

Besides the mountains and cosy towns, there are rolling vineyards, cascading falls, picturesque gorges and more to uncover. For individuals interested in expanding their knowledge about Swiss history and culture, indoor attractions such as the museums and art galleries are a great match. The bustling Christmas markets, scenic train journey, classic cheese and chocolate tasting tours and restorative thermal spas combine to create a unique and unforgettable Swiss winter adventure.



These are a handful of things you shouldn't miss in Switzerland during winter:



**Admire the art
of stillness in
Lucerne**

Admire the heavenly bliss of peace and serenity as you trace your steps through Lucerne. Experience the timeless charm of the place, imbued in every brick that makes it whole. The perfect day in Lucerne begins with witnessing the ethereal beauty of the dramatic Swiss Alps, which provide an excellent backdrop for your adventures. The same colossal peaks draped in white act as ornaments for the mighty Lake Lucerne, where boat tours remain up and running during winter. Taking a stroll through the snow-covered streets soon introduces you to the iconic Kapellbrücke, also called the Chapel Bridge. Running across the River Reuss, this 204 metre-long bridge not only connects to the Water Tower, treasury and a former prison but also links one to a feeling of nostalgia.



Experience the tri-cable Eiger Express Gondola

Perched at an elevation of 3454 metres, lies the highest train station in Europe, called Jungfrauoch. To reach this mighty UNESCO World Heritage-listed site, the Eiger Express from the Grindelwald terminal is the prime choice. This fast, tri-cable gondola takes you to the Eiger Glacier Station while soaring through the chilly sky. There awaits a train of the iconic Jungfrau Railway, which ushers passengers to Jungfrauoch, the Top of Europe.

At the summit, the entire world is rendered in sublime white silence. Glistening glaciers and towering peaks, draped in thick blankets of snow, claim the whole canvas. Here, amidst the thin

air and atmospheric stillness, every heartbeat becomes audible. The Ice Palace is a must-visit for those tracing the ancient steps associated with this site. Wander through its labyrinth of ice tunnels, where art is illustrated in the form of intricate ice sculptures of igloos, bears, huskies, penguins and more.



Board the scenic Glacier Express

Legendary rail routes and dramatic Swiss landscapes form a timeless pairing. Hence, a Swiss winter escape calls for experiencing the finest scenic train journey this charming nation has to offer. Aboard the famous Glacier Express lies an unforgettable 8-hour journey from Zermatt to St. Moritz. The journey flows hand in hand with the calmness and grace of the Swiss winter.

While the pace of this express train will not win any prizes, it certainly offers a relaxing, almost meditative, experience as it goes over 291 bridges and through 91 tunnels, covering captivating canyons, snow-laden meadows, ancient castles, colossal peaks and stunning glaciers. The elegance of 1930s engineering is palpable in every turn, most notably when passing through the Oberalp Pass and the six-arched bridge of the Landwasser Viaduct.



**Enjoy a cosy
spa in
Zurich**

Nothing complements the chill of a Swiss winter day as nicely as taking a restorative soak in a thermal bath. Defined as a hidden treasure, many make the mistake of overlooking this simple yet profoundly rejuvenating activity. Zurich has plenty of thermal baths and spas where you can experience this heavenly bliss. Surrender to the gentle warmth of the outdoor thermal pools while admiring the stunning views of the surrounding landscape, or opt for an indoor pool experience if you favour the peace and quiet during a chilly December day. Even quaint Swiss villages have options for authentic spa and thermal baths, which can easily be incorporated into one's travel timeline.





CHRISTMAS MARKETS

The Festive Splendor

Instead of breaking the gentle silence of the winter nights, the traditional Christmas markets add to its soft elegance. The sparkling festive lights illuminate the alleyways of major cities and Alpine towns, creating a fairytale-like charm. Countless stalls, dealing in a variety of products compatible with fitting in your luggage, set up shop during these hours. Among the many, the Christmas markets in Basel deserve a special mention. For families visiting Switzerland in Winter, these markets in the city can turn out to be a gold mine of memorable experiences.

Adults can shop for Christmas artworks, home decor, souvenirs, apparel and Swiss chocolates, while children can chase fun delights at the Fairy Tale Forest or enjoy a ride on the Christmas Tram. For a deeper and more immersive experience, consider celebrating medieval Christmas at UNESCO-listed Chillon Castle and watching the evening light show at Fairmont le Montreux Palace in Montreux.

Conclusion:

Trade the frantic rhythm of the world for a piece of absolute bliss and quietude in the winter haven of Switzerland. Admire the captivating grandeur of the mighty Alps, which stands in contrast to the timeless beauty and simpler pace of the Alpine towns. Amidst snow-draped landscapes, scenic train journeys and illuminated Christmas winter markets, take a part of Switzerland's comfort and serene stillness back home.

Curate your unforgettable winter adventure in the Alps. Plan your Switzerland winter escapade with SOTC.

Italy in Winter

A Mosaic of Artistry and Elegance



Italy sheds its bustling pace and finds comfort within the refined composure of winter. The season comes with a clear mandate: slow it down, adjust your tempo and savour every moment. The familiar marks of history and art get redefined by the soft and diffused light of the colder months. The sparsely populated streets unveil the real grandeur of every Roman column and Renaissance-era art. Even amidst the reign of the pervasive calm, Italy's festive spirit soars, fueled by the Christmas markets, New Year celebrations and iconic carnivals. The cool and crystalline air vibrates in resonant harmony with the sheer magnitude of the soaring Dolomites. Finally, for laid-back indulgence, Italian high fashion and gastronomic delights offer a soothing conclusion to any winter day.



The following list features some of the most iconic as well as the lesser-known experiences one can have during the Italian winter



**Have the
Roman Wonders,
All to Yourself**

The soul of the Eternal City, Rome, doesn't alter much with the shift to the colder months. Exploring this historic city in winter almost feels like a gem hidden in plain sight. Begin your day with a pilgrimage to St. Peter's or the mighty Colosseum. The absence of busloads of tourists blocking the sight lets you truly gaze upon and grasp the scale and magnificence of these wonders. The same cobblestone lanes feel wider, making a tour of the Roman Forum, Pantheon and other attractions more desirable. Instead of battling the sun's heat and glare, sightseeing in Rome in the warm embrace of a winter coat has a surreal touch to it.

The city gets a whole new shine with the tasteful decor of fairy lights around giant trees in every Piazza in December. The vast collections of the Vatican Museum become more accessible and enjoyable, thanks to the lack of long tourist queues. Should fortune favour your journey, January may grant the rare but magical sight of dusting snow upon the ancient stones of Rome. A truly rare phenomenon, contending to become a highlight of any Roman winter vacation.



**Experience the
Colourful
Venice Carnival**

The ethereal fogs and romantic canals set the tone for the winter season in Venice. Glimpse at the frescoes in Basilica di San Marco, stroll the empty piazzas and snap selfies beneath the Bridge of Sighs, all without the hindrance of a summer's bustling crowd. Globetrotters make their way to Italy at the onset of winter to feast upon the fascinating Carnival of Venice. Dating back to the 12th century, this celebration, born from the celebration of a military victory, soon evolved into an elaborate, annual occasion, integral to the veins of Venice. This 2-week grand celebration, usually taking place around the month of February, draws a crowd of millions every year. The Carnival of Venice is defined by its dramatic flair of exuberant masks and costumes, opulent masquerade balls and a kaleidoscope of colourful parades, providing a stunning contrast to the winter hush.





Enjoy an Ensemble of Art, History and Culture in Florence

Exploring the core of the Renaissance heart in Florence becomes an achievable dream when the tourist crowds thin with the onset of winter. There's no better start to the expedition than visiting the Galleria dell'Accademia, home to David, one of Michelangelo's flawless creations. Dedicate the entirety of your attention to each minute detail on the sculptures to grasp the brilliance of his work. Next, wander through the monumental Boboli Gardens, a fusion of nature and art, where manicured gardens, fountains, sculptures and artificial grottos whisper tales of a rich past. Include a visit to the Medici's Palaces for a detailed insight into Florence's artistic, historical and cultural heritage through its chapels, basilicas, hidden passages and palazzos.

Bask in the light of graphic displays and performances of the Firenze Light Festival between December and January. Watch the city's impressive radiance glow brighter through the dark winter skies. For shopping for luxuries, the Via de' Tornabuoni becomes the perfect runway, where shoppers can find exquisite deals on Italian fashion and accessories. For the festive soul, the Christmas markets in Piazza Santa Croce and the life-size nativity scene at Piazza del Duomo offer a more traditional experience.





A Luxury Cortina Shopping Experience

The mountain town of Cortina d'Ampezzo elevates luxury shopping to a spectacular level. Here, the breathtaking views of high peaks, the calmness of winter and the scent of pine trees come with the promise of a new design. The elegant promenade of Corso Italia turns into a runway for shoppers, lined with local designer stores and international luxury boutique stores on each side of the street. It is a shopper's haven, with options for designer clothes, local souvenirs, and performance sportswear. At the end of your shopping adventure, turn your gaze toward Tofane, one of the most famous Dolomite mountains to the west of Cortina d'Ampezzo. Among its three peaks, Tofana di Mezzo, the middle one, claims the title of the highest peak at 3,244 metres. Hop on the Freccia nel Cielo cable car ride from Cortina and embark on an unforgettable 5 km journey to the summit of Tofana di Mezzo and watch the world unfold beneath you.



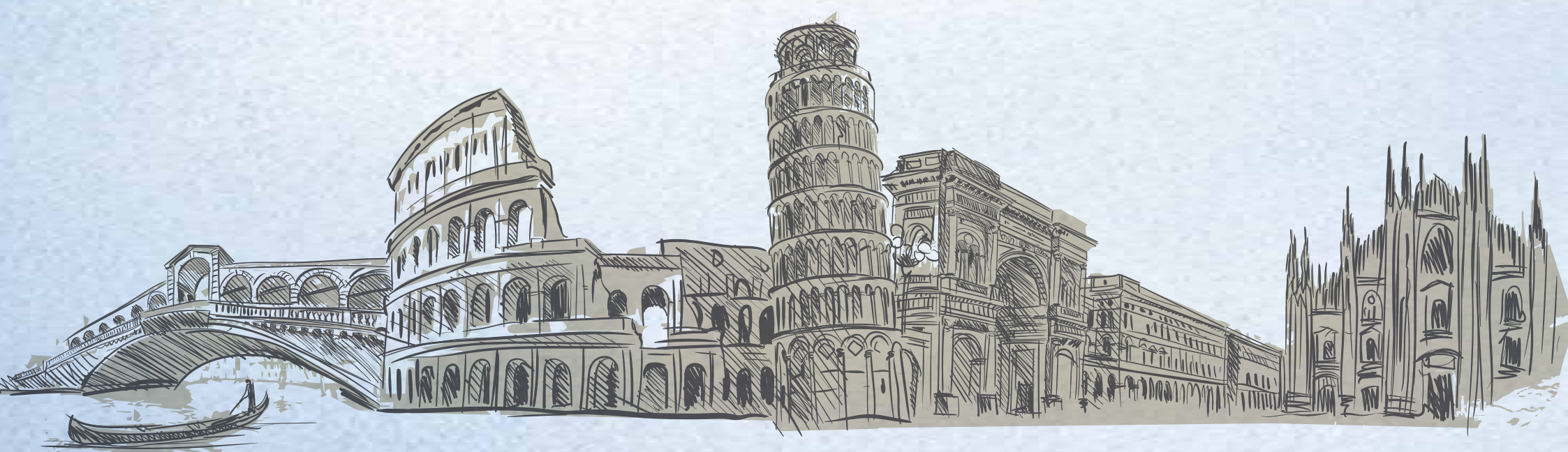
Explore the Grandeur of the Dolomites in Trentino

Experience a winter escapade like no other amidst the towering Dolomites in Trentino. A true hidden gem, take a gander at the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Dolomites as they impressively soar through the white shroud of snow. The mountainous landscape becomes the most desired backdrop for all kinds of winter activities. Glide across the white valleys of Pellizzano, Val di Sole, in the comfort of a traditional horse-drawn carriage. For a more exhilarating experience, horse riding in Madonna di Campiglio is a great fit. At the conclusion of the day, relieve every trace of tiredness with a calming, rejuvenating spa treatment in Pinzolo. Spend the night at a cosy hotel in Val di Sole, absorbing the mesmerising views of the sun slowly creeping behind the frozen peaks, painting strokes of purple and blue across the evening sky.



Conclusion:

From witnessing the grandeur of Roman wonders to losing oneself in the sheer spectacle of Venice Carnival, the Italian winters promise a journey like no other. It is an intimate mosaic of elegance and artistry, evident as you trace the steps of great Roman minds, admire the exemplary Renaissance-era creations, nurture bonds amidst the iconic beauty of the cities and bask in the scenic views and purple majesty of the Dolomites. Unlock your dream Italy holidays in winter with SOTC, India's leading travel expert.



Norwegian Winter

Find Peace Hidden Within Aurora
and Snow-covered Fjords



The tranquil attire of winter in Norway is as mesmerising as it gets. The allure of the chilly breeze gently soaring through the calm night sky can be just the reset one needs in their life. The legion of colossal peaks, grand glaciers and captivating fjords deserves the undivided attention of those who seek ethereal beauty beyond common comprehension. The historic landmarks, rich culture and unblemished trails open one up to the possibilities of finding the incredible. On your visit in the winter, let the aurora be your guiding light as you navigate the white silence of the Norwegian landscapes. Find comfort in epic proportions as the soothing blanket of white drapes the surrounding cities, towns and villages, marking the onset of the festive season.



As you prepare to bask in the essence of the silent sky and shadows of ice-edged fjords, be sure to embrace these essential experiences during the Norwegian winter



**Chase the
Northern Lights
in Tromsø**

Tromsø offers the perfect blend of impressive natural wonders and eccentric cultural experiences. Rise early with a cup of hot chocolate and set out on your expedition of the Arctic Capital on a reindeer sledge. The daylight hours are limited, so tick off as many experiences as you can before sunlight runs out. However, once the daylight hours end, the real party begins. Complementing the profound calmness of a winter night, a drama so sensational emerges that eyes can't simply resist getting a glance. The dark sky becomes a canvas as nature paints violet and emerald hues over your head. It's like celestial curtains, dancing to the rhythm of the chorus composed by the serene atmosphere.

This unforgettable natural phenomenon deserves your undivided attention, hence best observed from the comfort and warmth of a private glass cabin cocoon. Hire a guide to increase your chances of spotting northern lights and make a whole show out of it by adding a detour to a nearby Alaskan husky farm on the return journey.



**Experience the
best of Sami
Culture in
Finnmark**

For exploring Norway beyond the commercial tourism, surrender to the calm of winter silence and familiarise yourself with the Sami culture. The indigenous Sami people possess a rich history with their own unique traditions, language, music and dress. Native to the northern parts of Norway, Sweden and Finland, the Sami have essentially integrated within the modern Norwegian society and are a core part of Finnmark and Troms identity. Although small in number, many Sami families have kept alive the ancestral tradition of herding reindeer. Seek out your own antlered companion to guide your adventure across the frozen parts of Norway in winter.

Get the full, authentic experience by petting reindeer, going for a fun ride in a reindeer sledge and concluding your tour with a delicious traditional meal served within a lavvo, a traditional Sami tent. Deepen your understanding with a tour to Karasjok to explore the Sami National Museum and Sami Parliament. Follow it up with a short visit to Kautokeino to witness reindeer racing at the Sami Easter Festival and experience joik (traditional music) at the Sami Grand Prix.





Explore the wonders within the Lofoten Islands

Typically, the Lofoten Islands in Norway offer backpackers ample opportunities for thrillseekers. However, during winter, the shroud of white snow turns it into an ethereal drama, with performances of light and countless shades of orange, blue and green. Nestled in the turbulent waters of the Norwegian Sea, there's a long-lost calm infused deep within its core. It is a natural outpost that presents the best of Norway's theatrical landscape, comprising snow-clad mountains and deep fjords, and long beaches. The theme of unparalleled tranquillity extends to its cosy fishing villages, like Nusfjord, Reine and Henningsvær, with their red-painted rorbuer.

Fishing is the pulsating soul of the Lofoten Islands. Between February and March, the spawn of migrating Atlantic cod becomes the silver harvest that fuels the kitchens and traditional recipes on the island. While at it, don't forget to explore the Viking heritage of the Lofoten Islands. Trace your steps back in time at the Lofotr Viking Museum and learn about the first skilled craftsmen who settled on the islands. End your day with a hunt for the aurora, followed by a hot spa or sauna, before settling into bed.





Embark on a Scenic Train Journey

Europe has mastered the art of offering scenic train journeys, with Norway being rated one of the highest. Feast upon the dramatic landscapes beyond the clear window panels, while enjoying the comfort of a warm meal and cosy seat. The Bergen Line is the most popular of the Norwegian train routes. Beginning from Oslo, it traverses a route filled with panoramic mountains to Gol and Geilo. It then ascends to the heights of Finse through the Hallingdal Valley, gliding past the magnificent Hardangerjøkulen glacier before coming to a halt at Bergen. An unforgettable 7-hour train journey marked by mountains, forests, fields and fjords.

If such scenic train journeys seem the perfect fit for your Norwegian winter itinerary, you may also consider the Dovre Line, Flåm Line and the Rauma Line.



Meander the Streets of Trondheim

The tales of winter in Trondheim are themed around “Kos”, a local term for cosiness. Nestled almost at the halfway line between southern and northern Norway, Trondheim's charms are immortalised in the pages of history. Here, creativity exists in harmony with its iconic Viking heritage. The medieval era Nidaros Cathedral, considered a national treasure, stands tall in the heart of the city. The sculptures of prominent historical figures and a 10,000-piece stained-glass rose window of the cathedral will take you back in time once you step inside. Trondheim’s

cultural map also includes a stop at PoMo, a state-of-the-art museum. The car-free cobblestone streets of the Bakkalandet neighbourhood become integral to enjoying the urban beauty and peace of Trondheim in the winter.



Conclusion:

As the dancing Aurora and the snow-covered mountains peek through the white silence, Norwegian winter creates a legacy of unparalleled serenity, not just visual beauty. With ample opportunities to chase the ethereal lights and explore the quaint cities and villages, one doesn’t have to look any further for a reset that they greatly crave. Experience Kos, culture and nature’s grand scale, all at one destination. Create an itinerary that checks all your bucket-list items. Choose SOTC for your holidays in Norway during winter.



Winters in France

A Rhapsody of Romance, Extravaganza
and Culinary Delights



Experience the allure of France as winter turns it into an irresistible masterpiece of radiance and luxury. Here, the season is observed with unique intimacy, blending romance with the hushed, sophisticated grace. The brilliance of iconic landmarks and gastronomic delights goes hand-in-hand with the desire to shop for high fashion, transforming every snow-covered boulevard into a classic runway. Decide your own tempo and create unforgettable memories, all while basking in the simplicity of the gentle breeze and comfortable, warm clothes.

The crisp chill in the air descends with the fall of the mercury, and the bustling noise of the cityscapes softens. In winter's newfound elegance, the same city streets feel more alluring and the same provinces feel more grand. If you wish to explore France at its finest in winter, don't forget to try the following experiences:



Paris, Where Art Meets Palate

The stillness of winter in Paris casts a refined charm over the City of Love, turning every spotlight firmly onto the cultural landmarks and exquisite Parisian gastronomic delights. Stroll the Champs-Élysées to bask in the city's romantic ambience, browsing luxury boutique stores for high fashion or witnessing the elegance of French theatre. The monumental sight of the Arc de Triomphe marks the conclusion to this perfect wander, an ideal prelude to visiting attractions like the Louvre Museum, Eiffel Tower and Notre-Dame Cathedral.

In between admiring the icons, let simple pleasures, such as a cup of coffee paired with flavoured bread, be the soothing interlude. As the chilly breeze reminds you to tuck your jacket tightly every now and then, find comfort in the sight of the velvet lining of the classic Parisian cafes. Enter these fine establishments for some delicious coffee and engaging conversations. Enjoy a wide palette of delights, ranging from a hearty serving of Poulet Rôti to the simplicity of recipes like Pain D'épices. While at it, do explore the celebrated French patisseries and boulangeries for some macarons, mille-feuille, éclair, creme brulee, croissant and baguette.



Lyon, Where Festive Lights Illuminate Winter Evenings

Experience the welcoming winter evenings in the ancient city of Lyon. A pinnacle of French culture, history, and cuisine, the city boasts offerings that run deeper than its elegant facade suggests. Secret traboules run deep through its core, while heritage sites, such as the Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourviere, Lyon Cathedral and Terreaux Square, remain specimens of its timeless appeal. As the cold air starts to descend, Lyon goes through a total overhaul for the Fête des Lumières (Festival of Lights). What began as the Lyonnais lighting candles in honour of raising the bronze statue of the Virgin Mary soon blossomed into an elaborate celebration with artistic lights covering every street, building, park and square. Spearing through the hushed winter nights, these colourful hues resonate with the city's stillness, transforming Lyon into a magical wonderland. Strolling through the city, watching the familiar heritage landmarks, now bathed in colourful lights, is a feast for the eyes and the soul. The perfect conclusion to this festive night expedition is savouring the fine French cuisine that makes Lyon a celebrated gastronomic paradise.





Explore the wonders within the Lofoten Islands

The grandeur of the French Alps reaches its peak in winter. Here, the crisp air creates a symphony over the landscapes engulfed in thick, white blankets of snow. Wake up on the comfortable bed of a traditional cottage, starting your morning with hot chocolate by the fireplace, admiring the gentle rays and scenic views through the windowpane. Capitalise on the iconic charm and beauty of the mountains on a cable car ride in Chamonix. The vast, dramatic Alpine landscapes require exploration through fun activities, like snow-shoeing, ziplining and sledging. After a day spent making memories on the slopes, treat yourself to a luxurious spa experience. Rejuvenate your mind and body with a succulent Alpine meal featuring classic dishes such as tartiflette, gratin dauphinois and raclette.



Strasbourg, Where Christmas Magic Unfolds

Every year, Strasbourg makes its rightful appearance on various lists of the best European Christmas markets. Claiming the crown of “the capital of Christmas”, the city, which is usually known for quaint vibes, impressive architecture and historic sites, puts its A-game on as the colder months approach. Christkindelsmärik, a historic Christmas market in Strasbourg dating back to 1570, is one of the oldest of its kind in Europe. On par with its incredible history is its offering of a seamless blend of iconic French and German traditions, driving the irresistible allure of this seasonal market.

Its long and narrow layout offers plenty of space for hundreds of stalls dealing in festive goodies, including neon signs, cosmetics, plushies, intricate handicrafts and gastronomic delights. From scrumptious pretzels to the joy of sliced Currywurst with Spätzle, visitors are urged to arrive hungry. As the sun retires for the day, the attention of visitors culminates at Place Kléber. Here, the iconic Christmas Tree, adorned with a constellation of sparkling lights, illuminates the entire square and the hearts of its visitors.



**Route du Mimosa,
Where the Winter
Sunshine Warms
the Coast**

Seek a gentle respite from the winter chill without compromising on the peace of thinned tourist crowds along the Route du Mimosa. To the south of France, temperatures are mild and the scenery is exceptional. The 130-km stretch of road, called Route du Mimosa (D559), is a prime choice for serene road trips by car in the winter months. Running from Bormes-les-Mimosas to Grasse, the route unveils a striking contrast of bold, bright yellow foliage against the glistening azure expanse of the Côte d'Azur. It is perfect for tourists looking to enjoy life in France at a slower pace, pausing at panoramic medieval towns, alluring mimosa forests, charming festivals and stunning botanical gardens.



Conclusion:

Experience the spectacle of elegance, art, culture and romance during winter in France. See Paris beyond its well-known icons, featuring a shopping extravaganza and gastronomic ventures. Feel the festive lights in Lyon and Strasbourg glow as bright as the moon and admire the contrast of dramatic Alpine landscapes and the simple charms of sun-drenched Côte d'Azur. The allure of French tourism grows stronger with the drop in the mercury. Script your unforgettable winter romance across France with SOTC.



Elegance of Austrian Winter

The Symphony of Alpine Peaks and Classical Tunes



Venture into Austria in winter, and witness how the landscapes create an orchestra of unparalleled tranquillity and natural beauty. Bid farewell to the restlessness in your soul, and immerse yourself in the imperial calmness of the snow-covered Austrian topography. See how the mighty Alpine peaks line up and elevate to dramatic heights, their silhouettes resembling musical notes straight from Mozart's classical composition. Music and tunes are entwined with the very core of this nation, whether through simple jingles echoing through the Christmas markets or more elaborate theatrical performances hosted across its historic cities.

Austrian winter comes with the promise of delivering the untamed and raw beauty of Mother Nature, wrapped in the sophisticated elegance and calmness of a snowy winter. It becomes a place to unwind, experience and savour the ancient culture etched in the pages of history.



Wintertime adventures in Austria remain incomplete without the following experiences:



**Get in Sync
with the City
of Vienna**

As the winter season descends upon Vienna, it brings a symphony of festive lights that dances enthusiastically upon the pastel-hued buildings and their white facades. Every cobbled street and hidden nook receives its fair share of white snow, inspiring a sense of romance that soulfully nurtures amidst the calmness. In this city, mornings begin with a promenade through the Ferstel Passage. The intricate marble work and commanding pillars lining the passage whisper tales of Vienna's imperial charm. At every turn, a comfy coffee shop awaits, ready to serve a flavourful cappuccino to top up your expedition. Seekers of modern art can find solace in the elegant halls of the Albertina and sprawling Kunsthistorisches Museum.

A slight but necessary detour outside the city centre leads to the Schönbrunn Palace, an exemplary reminder of the Austrian royal heritage. The festive markets serving comforting bowls of garlic soup with bratwurst and käsespätzel become a well-deserved interlude for true food connoisseurs. Should your heart crave more traditional charms, indulge in a ride aboard a fiaker. Let the traditional carriage guide you through the historic city centre. By nightfall, your love for Vienna will expand tenfold.



Explore the Tunes and Beauty of Salzburg

Salzburg, the exquisite gem of Austria, welcomes winter in a wondrous fashion. It takes no time at all for the first snowflakes to descend and transform the city into a winter wonderland. Perched on a hilltop, the Hohensalzburg Fortress acts as the sentinel guardian, overseeing the city's seasonal transformation. The UNESCO-listed historic city centre of Salzburg drapes itself in white blankets of snow, elegantly mirroring the reflection of the golden hues of abundant fairy lights.

Amidst the stillness of freezing Alpine air, the cosy cafes brewing warm beverages and conversations become sanctuaries for patrons. As the city's core tempo begins to rise, even an untrained ear can catch captivating melodies that relay its timeless cultural charm. The musical history of Salzburg is undeniably astonishing. It is the revered birthplace of the legendary classical composer Mozart, whose timeless compositions still echo across various venues in the city. Centuries later, the city became the backdrop for the hit 1965 American musical, "The Sound of Music". High notes sung at the church choirs and flawless execution of Mozart's melodies keep Salzburg's unparalleled musical legacy alive.

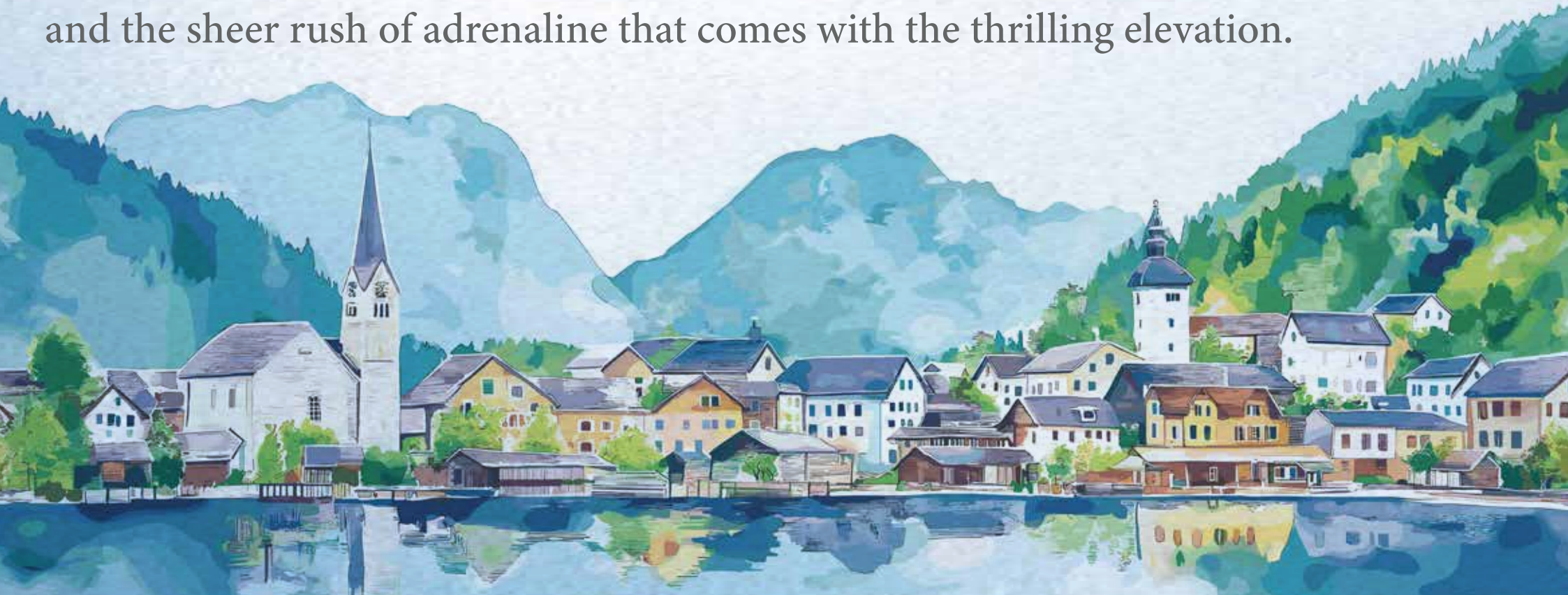




Unveil the Fairytale Stillness of Hallstatt

The fairytale stillness of Hallstatt embraces you the moment you step into this pretty Austrian village. The reflection of the snow-dusted, mismatched buildings falls magically upon the clear water of the lake, with soaring peaks completing the scenic puzzle. Yet, the real visual gem requires a lofty expedition a bit farther from the village. From Hallstatt, a short transit on route 543 by bus quickly gives way to a seamless cable car ascent. The view of the grand valleys and majestic peaks below is but a fraction of the wondrous delight that awaits at the summit. Disembark after the scenic climb, and take on an easy hike that guides you to the revered Five Fingers viewing platform, perched at 2,700 metres in the Dachstein Krippenstein.

Designed to resemble a stretched-out hand, this architectural marvel, also featuring a transparent glass bottom platform, is suspended 400 metres above the valley floor. The viewing point offers sensational, unobstructed views of nature's grandeur, comprising endless snow-covered Alpine peaks, the deep blue Hallstättersee lake, and the sheer rush of adrenaline that comes with the thrilling elevation.





Hop on the Cable Car to the Top of Nordkette

Nestled in the lap of the Austrian Alps is the marvellous city of Innsbruck. A slight gaze above eye level from anywhere in the city reveals the beautiful, snow-clad mountains acting as the dramatic backdrop to its varied coloured buildings. A winter venture in Innsbruck means savouring beverages at its quaint cafes and exploring the wonders displayed within its museums. However, the real icon of the city is hidden within the cable car ascent to Nordkette. The ride itself is breathtaking, quickly transporting you to new heights while allowing you to enjoy the scenic beauty and stillness of an Austrian winter morning.

It is a three-party journey, with the final stop being Hafelekar, the highest point in Nordkette, perched at 2,256 metres. The view from the top is a treasure to cherish for a lifetime, comprising ethereal Alpine peaks stretched as far as the eye can see, with snow-covered slopes at your feet and gentle clouds filling the void in the middle of this canvas.



Satisfy Your Appetite with Austrian Christmas Market food

The Austrian Christmas markets are among Europe's finest stages for seasonal joy. The main ones are centred around Vienna, Innsbruck, and Salzburg. The bustling fairy lights and the gentle, humming cadence of celebratory spirit give company to the surrounding calmness. To do justice to your elegant evening, a glass of rich, hot chocolate is all that is essential to warm both your cold hands and cheerful mind. For simpler delights, Ofen Kartoffel, or baked potato, claims a spot on the plate with its soulful filling of bacon, corn, cheese and sour cream. To truly fill your stomach, even a bowl of hearty Goulash from a less-crowded food stall can taste heavenly on a crisp winter evening. Top off your culinary adventure with the soft, sugary delight of Germknödel, providing your appetising expedition its deserving conclusion.



Conclusion:

Synchronise your spirit with the imperial winter cadence of Austria. Witness every scene, from the hushed elegance of the dramatic Alpine peaks to the soothing tunes of Mozart's classical composition, all in one place. Embrace the joy and delights brought by the Christmas markets and become a core part of the festive celebrations. Experience Austria's composition of winter charm, elegance and peacefulness with SOTC. Get in touch with our travel experts and plan your regal European escapade.

