

An aerial photograph of a picturesque mountain village in winter. The scene is dominated by snow-covered roofs of buildings, some in shades of yellow and white. A road winds through the village, and a river or stream flows through the valley. The background features majestic, snow-capped mountains under a blue sky with scattered clouds. On the left side, there is a decorative white line-art pattern of leaves and swirls.

Chocolate-box perfect

Ski Austria and Switzerland in style

Text: Dawn Gay



ki breaks to Switzerland and Austria conjure images of rustic alpine residences in mountain villages that resemble scenes from a Brothers Grimm fairytale. But behind the floral window boxes and wooden shutters, the resorts are a ski-season ahead of the game when it comes to luxury.

SWITZERLAND

Celebrity-spotting in the Valais

With sweeping panoramic views over the Grand Combin Massive in the Pennine Alps, Verbier is a rustic-chic winter wonderland. So it's little wonder that the rich and famous have laced up their star-studded crampons and made Verbier their luxurious winter retreat. Richard Branson and James Blunt grace the slopes in the Four Valleys regularly, while Bono was spied on the piste last season.

Verbier is ideally placed for corporate visitors, just 45-minutes from Sion International Airport, which serves the Valais Alps, and an hour from Geneva International. And you can forget the mundane tourist bus – private helicopter transfers are available from both airports.

Where to stay

activeFUSION offers a lifestyle approach to ski breaks with its contemporary alpine Nyumba and Dent Blanche chalets. You can treat your tired muscles to a hammam bath, pour yourself a tippie from the well-stocked wine cellar, or lounge in the home cinema. Director of activeFUSION, Sarah Bayley Slater explains: 'Both properties afford breathtaking views of the surrounding mountains, and internally they blend modern art, beautiful artifacts and furniture with contemporary design.' **More info: www.activefusion.ch** 📍

Crans-Montana makes its return

Another stylish Valais twin-town resort, Crans-Montana enjoyed its heyday in the seventies and lured retro actors Sophia Loren and Roger Moore to buy ski residences here. The region is now enjoying a renaissance as a stylish ski destination. The Crans plateau is also home to the famous 18-hole Severiano Ballesteros Golf Course, which hosts the prestigious Omega European Masters tournament.

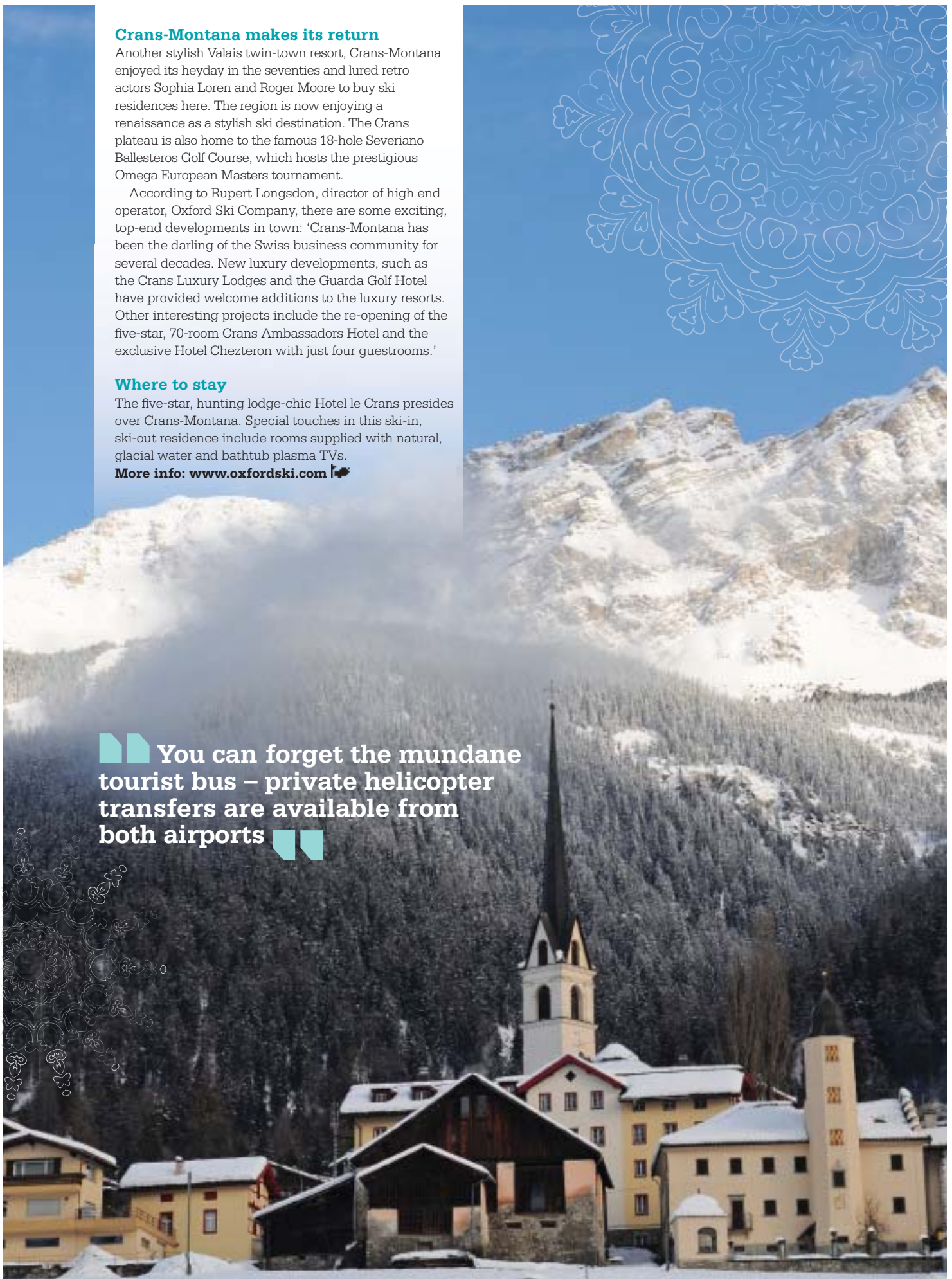
According to Rupert Longsdon, director of high end operator, Oxford Ski Company, there are some exciting, top-end developments in town: 'Crans-Montana has been the darling of the Swiss business community for several decades. New luxury developments, such as the Crans Luxury Lodges and the Guarda Golf Hotel have provided welcome additions to the luxury resorts. Other interesting projects include the re-opening of the five-star, 70-room Crans Ambassadors Hotel and the exclusive Hotel Chezteron with just four guestrooms.'

Where to stay

The five-star, hunting lodge-chic Hotel le Crans presides over Crans-Montana. Special touches in this ski-in, ski-out residence include rooms supplied with natural, glacial water and bathtub plasma TVs.

More info: www.oxfordski.com

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Imagine being dropped off by private helicopter to glide over untouched powder on open 4,200m high country runs in the morning, then teeing up on the green in front of the dramatic Breithorn peak in the afternoon

Seven-star extravagance in Zermatt

Overlooking the snow-capped Matterhorn, the cobbled, traffic-free town of Zermatt is the highest resort in the Swiss Alps and offers skiing 365-days a year. Imagine being dropped off by private helicopter to glide over untouched powder on open 4,200m high country runs in the morning, then teeing up on the green at the exclusive Golf Course Matterhorn in front of the dramatic Breithorn peak in the afternoon.

Where to stay

When it comes to accommodation, you'll be hard pushed to get anything as high-end as Elysian Collection's pair of seven-star chalet properties in Zermatt – Les Anges and Chalet Maurice. Guests staying at the palatial properties are served meals by Michelin chefs and plied with free-flowing Perrier Jouët.

More info: www.elysiancollection.com

Lakeside skiing in St Moritz

The high-profile slopes in the Upper Engadine Valley around swanky St Moritz have hosted the Olympics and glitzy FIS Alpine World Ski Championships, but there's more to this alpine metropolis than carving powder.

Glassy Lake St Moritz makes this location unmatched, and it's the place to be seen during annual sporting events. Mingle with the yachting fraternity for August's St. Moritz Match Race and rub shoulders with the racing glitterati when the snow-covered, frozen lake is transformed into the famous 'white turf' for February's St Moritz Racing Festival. 🏆

horse-drawn sleigh rides, golf on the frozen lake, bob sled runs, polo, and much more

Where to stay

If you have a penchant for gentrified touches, such as a personal chauffeur and professional chef on call, Chalet Chesetta will not disappoint. Andy Castle, managing director of Ski In Luxury, which manages the property, says its bespoke concierge service will help you embrace the St Moritz lifestyle. "This may include horse-drawn sleigh rides, golf on the frozen lake, bob sled runs, polo, and much more," he enthuses.

More info: www.skiinluxury.com

Regal Klosters

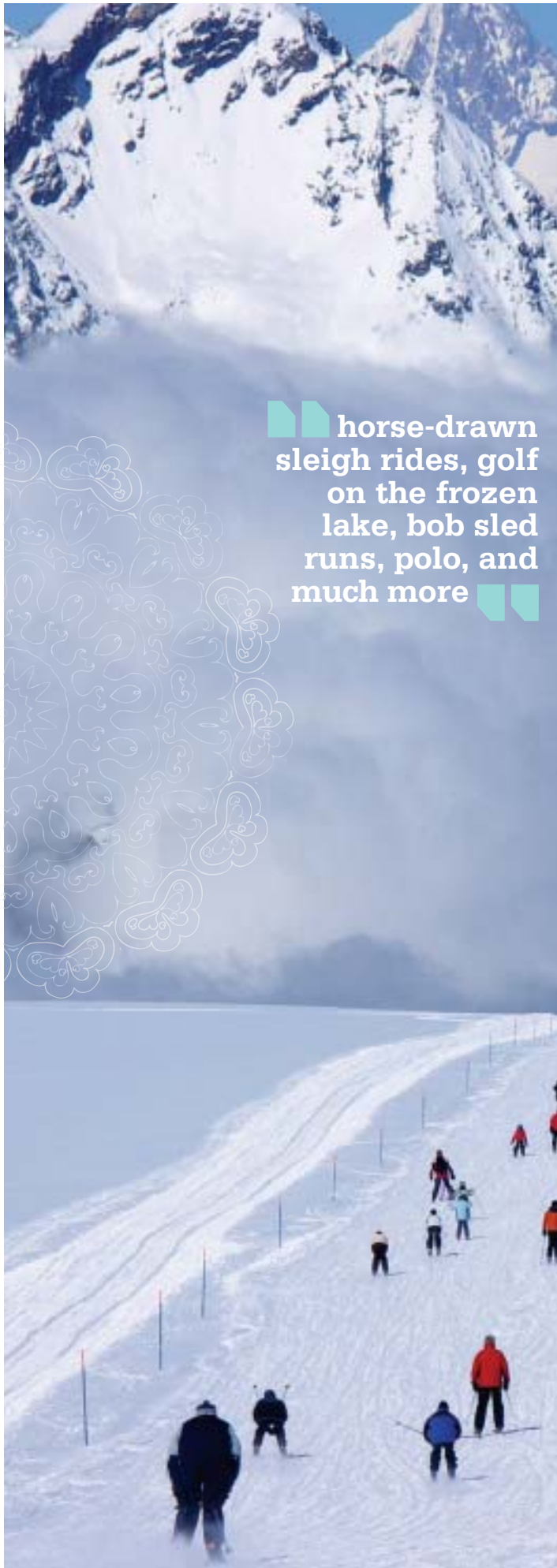
You might have to share the runs with the paparazzi when William and Kate are on the slopes in fashionable Klosters. The resort, with cable car links to 320km of slopes and seven ski areas around Davos, has long had the royal seal of approval as Prince Charles' favourite winter retreat.

Where to stay

Elysian Collection's Klosters property, Chesa Falcun, has wowed Bond author, Sebastian Faulks, who said of it: "There is no end to the extent of the service. A Swiss Christmas at the Chesa Falcun was the best one I've had since I rumbled Santa back in the great English freeze of '62."

This sumptuous, seven-star chalet sets the 007-standard with its heated driveway and chauffeur service to the nearby lifts.

More info: www.elysiancollection.com



AUSTRIA

Corporate team building in St Anton

The rustic, alpine town of St Anton nestles in Austria's Arlberg massif between the three dramatic peaks of Rendl, Gampen and Galzig, just an hour's drive from Innsbruck Airport. With over 260km of ski runs and almost double the distance again in off-piste opportunities, St Anton is for the real skier.

Après ski in St Anton is also a high-class affair. If bouillabaisse and lobster are to your taste, you can dine at the world's highest altitude two traube-rated Michelin restaurant, Galzig Verwallstube.

Where to stay

With top skiing and great dining, St Anton is ideal for corporate getaways. Kaluma Travel's Villa Montfort is decked out for business with state-of-the-art TVs, iPads and a standalone bar for team bonding. Says Kaluma's co-founder Andy Butterworth: 'The chic resort of St Anton offers everything for entertainment. All itineraries are tailor-made to each group, be it corporate or private.'

More info: www.kalumatravel.co.uk

Butler service in Lech

A twenty-minute drive along the valley from St Anton, you'll find exclusive Lech's sunny south-facing slopes and excellent off-piste skiing at 1,450m above sea level.

Where to stay

The Aurelio Clubhouse is one of the featured properties in The Oxford Ski Company's Luxury Chalet Collection 2012. The 16-person chalet has its own 23m indoor pool and grand living room, furnished with chandeliers and an open fireplace. Rupert Longsdon enthuses: 'This ski in, ski out hotel has all the facilities you would expect of a boutique hotel. A private pool, library and a butler are just a few of these luxuries.'

More info: www.oxfordski.com



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HIDDEN DRAGON

4 Vallees, Switzerland

Inspired by a passion for food, wine and hospitality, Hidden Dragon was established to celebrate the good life in a stunning alpine setting.

Staff are committed to providing dedicated personal service, with attention to detail that makes all the difference to guests. The fully catered luxury chalet has a private chef to provide guests with hearty breakfasts, tantalising teatime treats, tasty treats and evening feasts to satisfy even the hungriest skier.

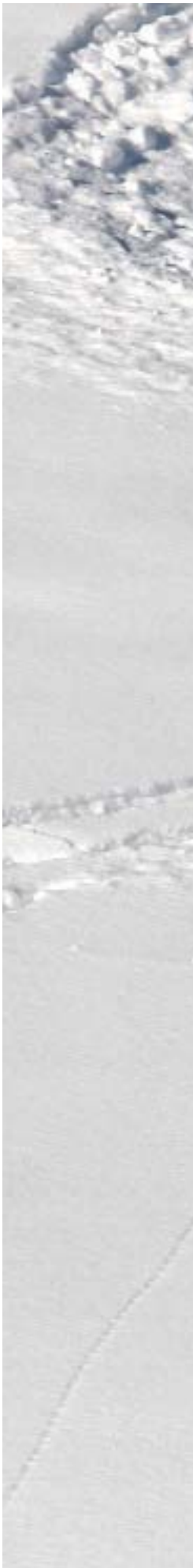
Due to the founders' Eurasian heritage, Hidden Dragon's cuisine embraces an Asian-fusion style, combining the Japanese philosophy of letting good ingredients speak for themselves and classical French cooking techniques.

Emphasis is placed on using the finest produce, and where possible using seasonal ingredients sourced from ethical and local suppliers. Luckily, the Valais canton is famed for its array of exceptional dairy produce, cured meats, fruit trees, vineyards, and highly prized Val d'Herens beef.

Although open all year round, the lodge really comes into its own when the first snow falls. For non-skiers, raquettes, cross-country skiing, tobogganing and ice climbing are all available, as well of course as shopping in nearby Crans Montana or a visit to one of the numerous local museums or galleries.

Anything is possible; staff can organise helicopter trips for those who wish to see the Alps from above, a Champagne picnic under the Matterhorn, or perhaps an afternoon husky sledding in Les Diablerets.

Relaxation is key to stays here. Luxury spa breaks include access to the sauna, hammam, hot tub, plus a meditation room, yoga deck, rain showers and massage therapy.



Hidden Dragon director, Ashlee Benis explains the rationale: 'Hidden Dragon was built according to shinto buddhist and feng shui principles to ensure a happy unity with nature. It was built with escape in mind and we hope our guests enjoy the positive and harmonious environment here, away from the urban stresses of the world. The eastern influence extends to our philosophy of holistic wellbeing where our spa menu incorporates revitalising treatments for a balanced mind, body and soul inspired by massage, meditation, oriental martial arts, yoga, energy healing and more. 'Hidden Dragon guests visit us for a back-to-nature experience in a barefoot luxury environment and if we have done our job right, they return home feeling happier, healthier, re-energised and refreshed!' **M**

For more information or to book online, visit www.hidden-dragon.com



FLIGHT OPTIONS:

London Gatwick to Vienna 18 January, 2012 £85 return via Flight Heros **0800 0407 135**

London Luton to Geneva 1 January, 2012 £79 return via **www.opado.co.uk**

London Heathrow to Vienna, business class return 3 January, 2012 £1,431 with American Airlines **www.aa.com**

London City to Geneva via Luxemburg, business class return 3 January 2012 £1,646 with Luxair **www.luxair.co.uk**

LOCAL LANGUAGES:

Austria: Austrian and German

Switzerland: mainly German

PISTES TO HEAD FOR IN AUSTRIA:

Ischgl Tyrol; St Anton Tyrol; itzbühel Tyrol

... AND IN SWITZERLAND:

Andermatt; Crans Montana; Saas-Fee

For a truly memorable dinner, Meze suggests visiting either of the following Michelin-starred restaurants:

www.philippe-rochat.ch/

www.steirereck.at/wien/restaurant/index_e.php

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