MAGIC of the MOUNTAINS



After a decade chasing podiums, two-time Olympic ski racer Charlie Guest knows the Alps like few others. She tells us why Austria still feels like home, which resorts top her list and why Milan-Cortina is the place to be this winter

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PHOTOGRAPHY: EMMA JACOB (BYDSAUP), ADRIEN VILLASTRUNGER/AFP

Right: A chairlift with views of the Matterhorn. Below: Charlie Guest at Beijing



'There's nothing quite as inspiring as skiing beneath the Matterhorn'

When Charlie Guest hung up her race skis last spring, she didn't rush to plan the next chapter. The mutli-garlanded skier – a five-time British Slalom Champion and the first British woman ever to win an Alpine European Cup race – remains very much at home on snow.

'I still love skiing,' she says. 'I've started doing some commentary, which lets me see the sport from another viewpoint – without the pressure I had before.'

For Charlie, Austria will always feel like her spiritual home. 'They're ski-racing mad,' she says. 'I spent so much time training there and I love the culture around skiing – it's friendly, accessible, and everyone joins in.' She still returns to Kitzbühel, Saalbach and Zell am See whenever she can, and enjoys the Austrian mountain food and après-ski scenes, which for Charlie 'are as much a part of the experience as the skiing itself'.

This winter, Charlie's attention turns to Milan-Cortina. 'It's so exciting to have a prominent tournament in Milan-Cortina again,' she says. 'My parents used to get up at two in the morning to watch my races in PyeongChang and Beijing, so at least no-one will have to do that this time.' Charlie believes the Winter Olympics will feel more connected than ever. 'With social media, we'll see amazing behind-the-scenes stories from athletes. Paris showed what's possible, and Milan-Cortina will bring that to the mountains.' She also hopes it will inspire the next generation. 'For us Brits it'll be emotional – it's Dave Ryding's final Games after five appearances – but there are so many exciting athletes coming through.' She tips Mikaela Shiffrin for a strong comeback, and names Lara Colturi and Atle Lie McGrath as stars to watch, highlighting Kirsty Muir, Mia Brookes and Charlotte Bankes as real medal hopes. Even though events are spread across the region – with a closing ceremony in the Arena di Verona – she thinks it will show the Alps at their best. 'They're iconic, the fans love them and they'll make for some truly exciting skiing. It's going to remind everyone just how special Europe's mountains are.' ▶



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If the action on the snow inspires you to plan your own mountain adventure, Charlie has plenty of tips. 'Austria is perfect if you're just starting out — resorts like Zell am See or Saalbach are friendly, great value and have plenty of easy terrain,' she says. 'They still have that small Austrian-town vibe, and having the lake at the bottom of the ski resort is quite special.' Her dream trip would be Zermatt. 'It's expensive, but there's nothing quite as inspiring as skiing around underneath the Matterhorn,' she says. 'It's one of the most iconic mountains in the Alps that's going to make you come back for more.'

For something quieter, she suggests Zinal in Switzerland. 'It's great for uncharted territory with a guide,' she says. 'The village feels very quaint, very old Swiss — none of the buildings seem quite straight — and you still get those amazing views and snow up high.'

And when she's back home, Charlie swaps the Alps for the Cairngorms. 'I'd come home from every race season and, if there was snow on the ground, I'd be out with my touring kit,' she says. 'It's not about hip-deep powder — it's about the excitement of getting outside and exploring more off-the-beaten-track areas.' ■



'The village feels very quaint, very old Swiss'



From top: Charlie competes in Finland in 2021; skiers in Austria

Iconic race pistes to try

LA FACE DE BELLEVARDE
Val d'Isère, France
This piste hosted the men's downhill event during the 1992 Winter Games, with a 71% gradient. Best skied in the morning for softened but unchurned snow.

LAUBERHORN
Wengen, Switzerland
The world's longest downhill run. Trace the pros' 4.5 km course beneath the Eiger, famed for its Hundschopf jump and notorious high-speed bends.

GRAN BECCA
Zermatt-Cervinia, Switzerland/Italy
The new and only cross-border World Cup run slicing through Switzerland and Italy. It's glacial, fast and framed by the Matterhorn. Gran Becca means 'great peak' in local dialect.

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