

St. Anton am Arlberg: From humble origins to an internationally renowned ski resort

Blending established ski tradition with contemporary service



It all started in 1880 at St. Anton am Arlberg. A Norwegian engineer strapped two planks of wood to his feet and „slid“ to work at the Arlberg Tunnel. At that time this little village at 1,300 metres above sea level was light years away from the world famous ski resort it has now become. Back then, the isolated mountain farming folk struggled under incredibly harsh conditions.

Photo: Hannes Schneider and his ski tracks – Picture from the Museum St. Anton am Arlberg. Copyright: St. Anton am Arlberg Tourist Board

Times changed rapidly, though, in St. Anton am Arlberg. All of a sudden it wasn't only Nordic guests conquering the pistes with their telemark turns – the locals were too.

The Beginning – Founding of Ski-Club Arlberg

The story began on the 3rd January 1901. Six friends walked from St. Anton am Arlberg to St. Christoph and were welcomed on their arrival by the innkeeper, Oswald Trojer and his daughter, Liesl. This meeting started with companionable drinks and ended with the foundation of Ski-Club Arlberg. Today, the Ski-Club can boast of over 9,150 members from 60 different countries. Only three years after founding the club, they realised their next vision by hosting the 1st „General Ski Race“. The great racing tradition of today can trace its` roots back to this first competition in 1904.

First ski school worldwide

This was just the beginning, however, for the dynamic St. Antoner's with their Ski Club and spectacular races. A local man, Hannes Schneider, was responsible for creating a landmark in ski history, by "inventing" the first ski school ever in 1921. Until that time, there was no ski resort where holidaymakers were divided into groups according to level and taught according to specified guidelines. Hannes Schneider was considered to be an idol after winning his first race at the tender age of 13. He skied in a particularly individual style and was the first to use a crouched position for downhill runs – which is still recognised today as the fastest and safest position. He also developed an entirely new turning technique – by transferring his weight on the skis to change course.

One of the first cable cars in the Alps

Local tourism was given an incredible boost, as increasing numbers of guests arrived wanting to learn Hannes Schneider's technique. It was now "in" to visit the mountains in winter and especially learn to ski. As the expectations of the visiting alpine enthusiasts grew, so did St. Anton and in 1937 one of the very first cable cars in the Alps was built. The Galzigbahn at St. Anton am Arlberg, enabling 210 persons per hour to access the heart of the ski region.

Into the modern era

Today St. Anton am Arlberg is an international holiday resort with 87 lift systems, more than 300 kilometres of marked pistes and 200 kilometres for free riders in the entire Ski Arlberg region. Around 1,000 hotels, pensions and holiday apartments, innovative customer service, a cable car with giant Ferris wheel, a wellness centre, multi-functional sport centre, gourmet cuisine, excellent summer walking and cycling region as well as a wide range of diverse events are the perfect ingredients for a great holiday. It is a remarkable accomplishment of the tourism organisers in St. Anton that they have managed to harmoniously combine years of tradition and history with the requirements of an international ski resort, whilst preserving the village's original charm. Furthermore, St. Anton am Arlberg is a member of „Best of the Alps“ – a merger of the 11 most traditional Alpine resorts in Europe.

Ski World Championships 2001 and new cable car technology

A highlight in recent history was the Alpine Ski World Championships 2001, which finally introduced St. Anton am Arlberg to the rest of the world. Structural changes made in preparation for the World Championships underline the cosmopolitan culture of this holiday region as well as acknowledging the necessity for top quality. With this in mind, two new lift systems have been constructed in St. Anton am Arlberg: the Galzigbahn, completed in 2006 and the Rendlbahn, repositioned closer to the village centre in 2009. Gone are the days of laboriously walking upstairs to the lifts, or having to take the bus to the old Rendlbahn to access the slopes at Galzig. Both lifts have been moved closer together during construction of the new Rendl-Bahn and are ground breaking examples of modern architecture and innovative technology.

Multifunctional Sport Centre arl.park

In the 19th century, guests and locals alike were at the mercy of the elements whilst indulging in their sporting activities. Nowadays, there is no reason for bad weather to spoil your holiday in St. Anton am Arlberg. Thanks to the multifunctional Sport and Climbing Centre arl.park, the choice of sports on offer is wide ranging and not influenced at all by adverse weather conditions. Choose from: tennis, volleyball, squash, bowling, climbing and bouldering. A trampoline hall with a total surface area of 1,000 square metres complements the facilities since summer 2019. A Lounge-Restaurant with spectacular views provides spectators with the ideal surroundings to chill out and enjoy.

Interski-Congress 2011

The Interski Congress at St. Anton am Arlberg in January 2011 provided us with a glimpse into the future development of winter sports (first time in 1991). Attracting more than 2,000 participants from all over the world, this event is one of the most important meetings of the international ski scene. Here the latest trends and developments in winter sports are analysed and new techniques presented. In 2011 ski instructors, teachers, sport scientists, medical professionals and other specialists discussed, amongst other things, the future of winter sports.

The Circle is Closed

The common tariff system at Ski Arlberg has been in place for many years, although the connection between Tyrolean St. Anton and Zürs in Vorarlberg was previously only possible by car or ski bus. When the new connecting cable car systems opened in the 2016/17 winter season, all ski resorts on the Arlberg were connected - turning it into Austria's largest inter-linked ski area with a total of more than 300 kilometres of marked runs and 87 lift and cable car systems. Winter sports enthusiasts can explore the entire Arlberg Arena "in one fell swoop": slip into their skis in St. Anton first thing in the morning, before heading to the sun-drenched slopes of Lech and Zürs, then over to Warth and Schröcken, before rounding the day off with the legendary "White Thrill" run back to St. Anton late afternoon. The full dimensions can be best experienced along the "Run of Fame": The ski circuit is dedicated to the memory of local downhill legends and leads throughout the entire Arlberg ski area, over 85 kilometres in length and encompassing no less than 18,000 metres in elevation difference.

Homecoming of the Arlberg-Kandahar Race

When the first international World Cup race was held in St. Anton back in 1928, the fast-paced Arlberg-Kandahar racecourse was received with much respect and euphoria. Almost a century later, athletes still feel much the same about the route. Since 2019, the international women's ski elite compete there biennially in St. Anton am Arlberg. Then participants in the Audi FIS Ski World Cup Ladies battle for valuable points and sporting reputations – at the place where it all began.

From yesterday to today

The Tyrolean mountain village has never forgotten its history – a visit to the Museum St. Anton am Arlberg is proof of that. The history of the region and skiing as well as the closely related cultural development and traditions are on display, spread over a series of rooms and on individual stations. Also, find out about the extraordinary story of the Brotherhood of St. Christoph am Arlberg. As early as 1386, Heinrich Findelkind (also known as Heinrich von Kempten) founded the Brotherhood in order to collect money to build a hospice on the Arlbergpass as a shelter for travellers who had fallen on hard times. With more than 18,000 members today, this „Association of Christian Charity“ is the largest purely charitable organisation in the world. Past and present – side by side in St. Anton am Arlberg.