

# Good... in practice Alpine destinations for sustainable tourism

A COLLECTION OF SUSTAINABLE ALPINE DESTINATIONS ON A  
PATH TO SUSTAINABILITY AND INNOVATION IN TOURIST  
OFFER

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## **Introduction**

In this brochure, a selection of tourist destinations localized across the Alps have been collected and briefly presented.

All the towns, villages or regions included in this small selection have been working with local communities and stakeholders in order to offer innovative, sustainable tourist products and services to visitors. The destinations you will find in this brochure were selected based on the information provided by Countries participating in the Working Group on Sustainable Tourism of the Alpine Convention as exemplary locations for implementing best practices for greening alpine tourism. They are already committed to support initiatives that may couple tourism competitiveness with a sustainable, long-term management of the unique Alpine assets and landscape hosted in their territories.

The distinctive characteristics of these destinations - that you will find described in short in the following pages - suggest their suitability to form a basis for an international network of mountain resorts being capable of promoting an innovative model of sustainable tourism in the Alps.

# Chamonix, the cradle of winter tourism in the Alps

## Where

Chamonix-Mont-Blanc is a French municipality of about 9.000 inhabitants located in the Haute-Savoie Department of the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Region.

## Landscape and environment

The Chamonix valley is situated in the north-western part of the Alps, 15 km far from the Swiss border via the *Col des Montets* and 15 km from Italy via the *Mont-Blanc tunnel*. The natural border, where these three countries converge, lies at 3820 meters on the summit of Mont Dolent. This valley, comprising Servoz, Les Houches, Chamonix, Argentière and Vallorcine, also hosts the Mont Blanc, the Western Europe's highest peak at 4,810.45 meters. The Chamonix Mont Blanc valley's altitude varies between 758 and 4,810 meters. Chamonix and its valley are bordered by the Mont Blanc chain to the South and the Aiguilles Rouges ("Red Peaks") to the North. This glacial valley measures 17 km, from the Col des Montets at the Northernmost point to the Taconnaz torrent. The town center lays at 1035 meters, while the highest village of Le Tour at the top of the valley at 1462 meters.

## A tourist destination

Chamonix offers a tourism oriented mainly to winter sports activities. In fact, winter tourism accounts for more than 53% of annual stays, so much so that the municipality has developed a strong hotel capacity. Thanks to his past in the Olympic Winter Games, the municipality has been able to equip itself with many infrastructures for skiing activities (such as ski lifts, chair lifts, local buses, etc.). Especially in summer, the whole valley is greatly appreciated by enthusiasts of mountaineering and mountain sports in general. Chamonix is famous for its hiking trails in the mountains: the Tour du Mont-Blanc (TMB), one of the most popular long-distance trekking routes in Europe, of about 170 km around the Mont Blanc massif, in Switzerland (Martigny), Italy (Courmayeur) and France (Chamonix). However, supported by the rich diversity of its villages and outstanding natural assets, it offers the typical Savoyard cuisine and numerous leisure activities for a wide range of people: from families to adventurers, to visitors seeking leisure and relax, to tourists keen on discovering novel things and experiences. Rock climbing can be practiced in many natural sites (e.g. Gaillands rock), and competitions are organized every year. Mountain biking and paragliding, summer tobogganing, tree climbing and horse trekking are practiced. The Chamonix golf course and its 18 hole course at the foot of Mont Blanc, the city swimming pool, curling and ice hockey courts and eight tennis courts further enrich the tourist offer.

## Good....in practice

Sustainable mobility has been a priority for all the Community of Municipalities reaching over the valley of Chamonix, that includes the 4 municipalities of the Canton (Chamonix-Mont-Blanc, Les Houches, Servoz, Vallorcine). The community has been involved in strengthening transport infrastructure (modernization of the railway line, strengthening public transport, etc.), as well as in strategic and innovative approaches to reduce CO2 emissions, in line with the Territorial Energetic Cluster Plan (PCET) of the valley approved in 2012 and the Atmospheric Protection Plan (PPA). The valley is committed to renovating and increasing traffic on, the railway infrastructure running from the valley floor

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(Le Fayet) to the Swiss border, that has become an integral part of the identity of the territory. The recently improved bus service run by Mont-Blanc Bus uses a new bus fleet of mainly Euro 6 standard vehicles, 6 hybrid buses and 2 small 100% electric shuttles. All the service, including the timetables, adapts to the flow of tourists by season (7 lines in spring and autumn, 10 in summer and 15 in winter). To encourage public mobility, the Community of Municipalities established within its perimeter the free circulation in public transport.

# Cortina, tourist pearl of the Dolomites

## Where

Cortina d'Ampezzo is an Italian town of about 5 840 inhabitants in the Province of Belluno in Veneto. Named "Queen of the Dolomites", it is the largest and most famous of the 18 municipalities that make up the Ladinia region, as well as a renowned winter and summer tourist resort. Cortina hosted the Winter Olympics in 1956 and is the scene of numerous international sport events related to the mountains and winter sports. Covering a surface of 252.81 km<sup>2</sup>, Cortina d'Ampezzo is the second largest municipality in Veneto (after Venice).

## Landscape and environment

Cortina is located in the center of the Conca d'Ampezzo, in the upper Valle del Boite (about 1200 m high), which was the terminal basin of an ancient glacier, between Cadore, Val Pusteria, Val d'Ansiei and Alto Agordino). The Regional Natural Park of the Dolomites of Ampezzo, entirely included within the municipality of Cortina, covers about 37,000 ha. The park includes many famous Dolomite groups: the Cristallo, the Tofane, the Fanes peak, the Col Bechei and the Croda Rossa. Some of these massifs have peaks higher than 3,200 meters and enclose some small. The park hosts nineteen tourist facilities (including restaurants and alpine huts), and plateaus for high altitude pasture.

## A tourist destination

Due to its location and its tourist tradition, Cortina has developed a varied tourist offer for activities and seasons. In summer, the tourist offer focuses on the surrounding landscape. The valley, between Cadore (famous for its valuable timber used for musical instruments) and Val Pusteria, extends from Falzarego to Tre Croci Pass – bordered by the most beautiful mountains of the Eastern Dolomites: Sorapiss, Antelao, Croda da Lago, Tofane, Croda Rossa, Cristallo. 300 km of trails for hiking include "Montanelli path" from Pié Tofana, tour of Val Travenanzes and Fanes waterfalls, Lake of Federa, Laghetti di Pianozes, d'Ajal, Ghedina and Lake Sorapis, famous for the color of its waters. Another important attraction is Natural Park "Dolomiti d'Ampezzo". There are also mountain bike and climbing routes; exploration of the mountain and promotion of mountaineering tracks and excursions with an historical service of Alpine and nature guides. In winter, as one of the most famous tourist resorts in Italy, Cortina season lasts from November to April. 110 km of downhill slopes and around 70 km of cross-country trails make Cortina one of the world's centers of Alpine and Nordic skiing. Winter sports offered include ski mountaineering, walks on the snow, ice climbing, curling, horse-drawn sleigh rides. The town also hosts an Olympic Ice Stadium and a swimming pool. Cultural tourism developed around art exhibitions and literary events of high level, meetings with people from cinema, politics and journalism, musical and cultural events. Major sports events include the Women's Alpine Skiing World Cup; the "Dobbiaco-Cortina" international cross country competition, A-Series ice hockey championship. A unique tradition of local craftsmanship (especially on wood), huts and restaurants where local products can be tasted (salami, speck, barley soup, "casunziel", dumplings, polenta, strudel, grappa, liqueurs) make of Cortina a globally known destination.

## Good....in practice

Following main environmental engagements, including the Paris Climate Agreement on climate change (2015), the Italian Ministry for the Environment (2016) together with Comune di Cortina, Regione Veneto, FISU, CONI, ANEF signed the "Carta di Cortina" (Cortina Charter), whereby the Town, through

exemplary good practices and actions, has committed to protecting the local territory and environment and reducing the environmental impact of major winter sports events, particularly Ski World Championship in 2021. Aware of the environmental impacts of winter sports, the Charter sets guidelines to be followed in a region keen on green economy as Cortina and the Dolomiti Unesco site. The Charter aims to set an example to be shared with other mountain resorts willing to commit to reduce environmental impacts of winter sports events, by increasing resource efficiency, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and energy costs. The Charter commits the signatories to put sustainability and territorial enhancement at the core of the planning of Ski Championship in Cortina 2021, and starting an open participatory process for local administrations and communities for identifying the main sources of environmental impacts, the possible solutions and intervention areas. The Charter also promotes National Programs on Winter Sports, campaigns for awareness raising, education and workshops on sustainable development for citizens.

## **Kamnik: wellness, local products and environment**

### **Where**

Kamnik is a municipality in Slovenia covering an area of approximately 265.6 km<sup>2</sup>. Located less than 30 km far from Ljubljana, it has about 28,800 inhabitants.

### **Landscape and environment**

Kamnik is an ancient town located in the hilly area along the Bistrica plain on the right bank of the river Bistrica. It lays at the foot of the Kamnik and Savinja Alps known as "Kamniško-Savinjske Alpe", the Kamnik Alps. The town is in fact dominated by 2558 m of Mount Grintovec, the highest peak in the mountain range.

### **A tourist destination**

Kamnik attracts many visitors especially for its wellness tourism. One of the main attractions of the area are the Snovik baths, famous for being the highest altitude spa in the whole of Slovenia. The city also relies heavily on its culinary tourism, thanks to the culinary excellence of Velina Planina, where some of the best dairy products are found in the whole of Slovenia. Famous also for its history, testified by the presence of the Stari Grad ruins, Kamnik offers visitors one of the best preserved historical centers in terms of monumental buildings. Kamnik is the main centre of the outstanding mountainous area where Velika Planina mountain is located. Hikers and for those who want to deepen the pastoral traditions of the area consider this peak and region an ideal destination. Equally famous is the Arboretum Volcji Potok, a botanical garden hosting about 3500 different horticultural varieties. The surroundings of the city offer sports attractions thanks to the many hiking trails of the Kamnik Alps circuit.

### **Good....in practice**

In the field of energy efficiency, the SPA facility of Snovic has received the European Eco-Label award for tourist accommodation services in 2008. The structure, whose buildings are made with environmental-friendly materials, uses renewable energy sources for heating and air-conditioning (wood-biomass, solar collectors for heating the pool water, vacuum solar collectors, water-water and air-water heating pumps) and promotes a system of separate waste collection. The main goals of the management of the structure are primarily the contribution to the control and reduction of environmental impacts, as well as the sensitization of the guests on the importance of environmental and nature protection.

A traditional cheese of the area of Velika planina (hard cheese with a "pear" shape) has been supported and spread on the national market through large-scale production, and qualified as one of the local "culinary tourism contents". Local producers use a single corporate identity, a special packaging, and an "ad hoc" certification scheme. Now Velika planina cheese is available in shops and restaurants throughout Slovenia. The initiative was given the Snovalec Award as an example of transforming a forgotten traditional regional food into a major "invention" throughout Slovenia.

## **Valli di Lanzo, a paradise for mountain sports fanatics**

### **Where**

The Valleys of Lanzo are three valleys of Piedmont Graian Alps, between Valle dell'Orco (North) and Val di Susa (South). They include several municipalities, totaling 38,736 inhabitants.

### **Landscape and environment**

The Lanzo Valleys are composed of 3 main valleys, oriented from west to east, ending in the town of Lanzo Torinese, located on an ancient glacial moraine. The surrounding area is characterized by millennial glaciers, and dozens of peaks above 3,000 meters in height. The border with France is formed by high mountains with melting glaciers and mountain pastures used for cows, sheep and goats grazing. The valley bottoms host ancient centers, divided into numerous hamlets. The intermediate slopes of the mountains have wooded areas, re-colonized by trees after the decline of agricultural and pasture areas. In the past, the main activities were sheep farming, agriculture and mining: especially iron extraction and processing in the middle / lower valley.

### **A tourist destination**

Lanzo valleys was a luxury tourist destination in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth century, given the proximity to Turin and the presence of a railway. Local alpine guides were renowned at the end of the 19th century. From the 1960s to the 80s they have been a holiday resort destination – that has left a large number of second homes on the territory. Now, Lanzo Valleys aim at a tourism that values its unique landscape, historical and cultural resources and local production supply chains. Tourists seek hiking, cycling, and other outdoor activities, favored by the natural environment and landscape. The valleys are equipped with sports facilities accessible to all and offer activities such as fishing, summer and winter hiking on snowshoes or ski-mountaineering, trekking, curling, climbing, paragliding, kayaking. Tourist attractions also include local gastronomic products among which the "Toma di Lanzo" cheese is certainly the most important example. The relaunch of local culture is taking place also by promoting the Sindonic tracks, linked to immemorial religious tradition.

### **Good....in practice**

“Montagna per Tutti” (Mountain for all) consists of a series of events in the Lanzo, Ceronda e Casternone Valleys, originally in winter but now extended until spring to promote an all-season tourism. Activities are offered to all mountaineers and people in outdoor activities, but a special attention goes to soft activities in order to allow everybody to enjoy the experience. In winter excursion with snow sticks are proposed, while in spring cultural events and cycling are promoted. To increase accessibility for all, partnerships have been started with NGOs in the field of disabilities in the Turin area. Over the last 10 years the Local Action Group financed the renovation of facilities and training courses for tourist operators.

## **Jezersko – Sustainable Mountain villages**

### **Where**

Jezersko measures 68.8 km<sup>2</sup>. The main settlement of Zgornje Jezersko lies at an altitude of 906 m in the central part of the eastern Karavanke just next to the border with Austria and forms a specific settlement area where the influences from the Carinthian and the Gorenjska sides are intertwined. A major traffic link runs through the center of the city: the path through the picturesque world of the hilly Karavanke mountains and the mighty Kamniško-Savinjske Alps are located along the Kokra and Jezernica and beyond the Jezerski vrh and the Bela valley in the Roman times. The lower Jezersko consists of several hamlets and solitary farms in the narrow valley of the Kokra River. The core of the settlement is a clustered hamlet of the Lower End at the confluence of Kokra and Jezernica.

### **Landscape and environment**

Jezersko lies in the Alpine valley between the peaks of the Kamnik-Savinja Alps and the Karavanke Mountains. The valley is surrounded by forests of conifers and deciduous trees, meadows, pastures and clear mountain streams. As much as 64.6% of the total area of the municipality belongs to the protected area of Natura 2000. The vegetation present with chlorophyll green color together with the wetland has a beneficial effect on the well-being and the airways and eyes, therefore the place was recognized as a health resort.

### **A tourist destination**

Due to the large number of altitudinal belts (700 m - 2500 m), Jezerska grows over 1000 plant species: 53 of them are protected, and 20 endemites are narrower or wider. Among other animals, we encounter typical alpine species, such as gams, goats, whites, crumbs, large cocks, mountain hares and mountain swamps. The special richness of the cultural heritage is certainly in the original image of the preserved homestead, the unique architectural legacy of our ancestors, which was created from the 16th century onwards. Their carefully selected location shows that they were mostly built on the shores of the former large glacier lake. Today, these homesteads live from forestry, tourism, sheep and livestock farming, they are becoming self-sufficient and more and more follow the guidelines for organic production. Jezerians are proud of the autochthonous Lake-Solčava breed of sheep. The sheep is fertile throughout the year, and supplies the population with quality wool and meat, and its characteristic is considerable resistance to disease and harsh weather conditions. The source of the healing mineral water of Lake Slatina in its descriptions is first mentioned by the famous Slovenian researcher and polychister Janez Vajkard Valvasor in the 17th century. Jezerska slatina contains a lot of calcium and manganese and ammonium substances and, according to the content of carbon dioxide, is the leading source among Slovene springs. Especially recommended for patients with heart and vascular diseases, it also has an excellent effect on digestion. Jezero mountain trail -

As early as 1972, the Jezero mountain society connected the peaks and mountain huts around the valley to a circular transversal and issued a diary. Over the decades, hundreds of enthusiastic visitors and visitors have received awards for the walk that has been going on, and this year (2018), with the renovation of the booklet into a guide and edition in the English language, the lake mountain path is finally accessible to

visitors and visitors from abroad. The path connects 15 peaks and 5 mountain huts, it is over 100 km long and overcomes 10000 m altitude difference.

Lake Culinary Heritage offers two original experiences that can not be tasted anywhere else: the first is a typical shepherd's dessert, made from cream and buckwheat, the other is a bulla, from bread, eggs, meat, cream and spices baked Easter cake for which each lake house has its own recipe. Breakfast and light meals can be enriched with local products: lactic dairy products, dry meats, marmalades, honey, herbal teas and syrups, and local origin also some meat specialties (baked lamb, trout and game) and mushroom specialties. Goodies and specialties can be served with homemade liqueurs.

**Good ... in practice**

Bergsteiger Dörfer are a network that brings together the places and municipalities in the Alps with a focus on sustainable mountain tourism and represent great potentials in mountain tradition, culture and organization. The villages provide a high quality offer for mountaineers, a varied landscape and are committed to preserving local and natural heritage.

<https://gorniskevasi.pzs.si/>

<https://www.vilaplaninka.com/en/>

## **Zermatt, world famous and sustainable?**

### **Where**

Zermatt lies in the south of Switzerland at the border to Italy. Peaks within the community borders include the famous Matterhorn and 22 of the 82 alpine four-thousanders.

### **Landscape and environment**

39 mountains of more than 4000 meters in height surround Zermatt from three sides, creating an especially dry climate. Zermatt has the highest forest border in the Alps (between 2400 to 2500 meters). Some areas of the Zermatt mountain area rose above the glaciers during the last ice age. This means that parts of the flora date from the time before that. Zermatt combines four different geological zones with varying chemical composition. 75 percent of the municipal area consist of nature reserves of national and international importance. The vegetation areas of international and national importance cover a total of 6.2 km<sup>2</sup>.

### **A tourist destination**

The history of Zermatt as a tourist destination goes way back to the 17th century. However with the golden age of alpinism, touristic activity started to pick up. The Matterhorn was one of the last alpine peaks to still be climbed for the first time (successful attempt in 1865). The infamous mountain area rapidly led to an increase in tourism – especially from England – and the first notable Hotel "Monte Rosa" opened its doors for their guests in 1855. Last year alone, Zermatt had a total of a little over 2 Million overnight stays. Adding the day tourists, this makes it especially challenging to preserve the local natural and cultural heritage.

### **Good...in practice**

Zermatt has started to make their destination car-free since the 1931. Well, not completely car-free: in some cases, the community licences exemption permits for electric or other emission free transport. There are around 500 specially designed, slow electric vehicles registered and some horse-drawn carriages. How do the tourists access Zermatt? They take the shuttle-train from the neighbouring Täsch, 5km away, with a big car parking right next to the station. These measures increase overall quality of life by reducing traffic and subsequently improving crowd-movement, promoting slow mobility and reducing noise emissions and air pollution. The city is labelled "Energiestadt" – corresponding to the European Energy Award – and has achieved 59% of all measures through innovative policies such as air quality regulations; a biogas power plant, a smart and awarded waste disposal system ([www.system-alpenluft.ch](http://www.system-alpenluft.ch)) and 60% of the consumed energy produced by waterpower. With the "Monte Rosa"-mountain hut Zermatt also possesses a lighthouse project in terms of sustainable and energy efficient construction in fragile ecosystems. The hut was developed in cooperation with the ETH Zürich and opened in 2010.

## **Saas-Fee, a small but innovative jewel**

### **Where**

Saas-Fee is the biggest town in the Saas valley, located in southern Switzerland and next to the Italian border. Saas-Fee lies on 1800 m at the foot of the Mischabel mountain range with 11 four-thousander peaks.

### **Landscape and environment**

Eight municipalities lay in the Saas valley with a total population of only around 6'000 inhabitants. The Saaservispa flows through the valley, which towards the upper end has a distinct U-shape. The Saas valley has the highest concentration of four-thousanders in the alpine region. The valley also presents the very traditional and distinctive "Walser" architectural style, dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

### **A tourist destination**

Due to its remote location, the economy of the Saas valley has been mostly related to agriculture. Not before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century did Tourism start to pick up. With the opening of the first ski lift in the valley and a new road shortly after World War 2, mass tourism – especially in the winter season – had arrived. Overnight stays rose from 66'000 in 1950 to around 1'000'000 annually in recent years. Difficult years after the financial crisis led to a new approach to season ticket pricing with an increase in guests of 33%.

### **Good....in practice**

Saas Fee is a highly popular destination with a very traditional appearance: but only on the outside! Since 1996 Saas-Fee is a pilot municipality of the Alliance in the Alps for the implementation of the goals of the Alpine Convention. Saas-Fee is car-free since the 1980s (except electric public transport). Around 1 Million Swiss Francs had been invested to supply a fine dust particle filter on all wood heating systems in the village with the goal to make it the first alpine destination to be 100% fine dust free. Furthermore, 100% of the energy consumption is from sustainable energy sources. Saas-Fee has implemented a solar powered long-distance heating system, which is to be developed further in the future (as well as public and private heating techniques in general). Like Zermatt, Saas-Fee is labelled "Energistadt" with 62% of the measures reached to achieve the European Energy Award Gold Standard (75% or more) and promotes individual efforts towards sustainability by advising interested citizens.