

Das Central

AUSTRIA ➔ ANTONIA WINDSOR



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SET THE SCENE

After a leisurely hour's drive from Austria's Innsbruck airport, I arrived into the popular ski resort of Sölden, in the Ötztal Valley of Tyrol. Timber-clad Das Central hotel is one of the largest buildings in the village and certainly the most striking with its elevated infinity pool jutting out over the Ötztaler Ache river. It's the only five-star hotel in the resort and it attracts an upmarket crowd who come for the fine dining, friendly service and one of the best spas anywhere in the Alps.

THE VIBE

This is very much an Alpine hotel and staff dressed in *dirndl* and *lederhosen* welcomed me with easy smiles each time I walked into the reception. I was there in ski season, during which guests padded around at breakfast in merino base layers and ugg boots. In spring and summer it's all about mountain biking and hiking and perhaps a yoga session with alpacas on a terrace with a view. The spa is a big draw here all year round, so I also encountered people strolling the corridors in their bathrobes on their way to and from the saunas or pools. However, come evening, everyone switched into elegant attire for dinner.

THE ROOMS

I stayed for a couple of nights in one of the wellness suites, called Söldenkogl. With so much to do elsewhere, I didn't make as much use as I'd have liked of my personal infrared sauna with views of the river, but it was a great way to warm up after the slopes. The beds are superking and super comfortable and a separate dressing area was useful for keeping my ski gear out of the main room. The decor is a blend of traditional and modern with plaid woolen fabrics in neutral tones, sleek wooden furniture and marble bathrooms.

THE FOOD AND DRINK

The gourmet Restaurant Ötztaler Stube has quite deservedly gained a Michelin star since my visit. The restaurant is in a pine-clad room that hasn't been redecorated since 1969 and it really felt like being in a traditional Austrian mountain restaurant. And yet, when the food came,

it was theatrical and modern and belied the setting. I was particularly intrigued by the "butter candle", which dripped butter onto breadsticks. Both the five-course or seven-course tasting menus offer a feel for chef Stefan Speiser's culinary artistry. Elsewhere in the hotel Restaurant Feinspitz has full buffet spread at breakfast, and a buffet starter and dessert at dinner with main dishes prepared to order from the menu. For more casual dining and light bites there's Marend Stube, and Summit Bistro for a green juice or healthy snack in the spa.

FACILITIES

The Summit Spa was definitely a highlight, with an outdoor glass infinity pool that suspended me 17 metres above the river to enjoy the panoramic mountain views.

Inside, the spa spans 2,000 sq metres with treatment rooms, a brine steam bath, a cold-water plunge pool, and two newly built saunas. The stand out for me was the cryotherapy chamber, with its challenge of two and half minutes standing in my swim suit in -110°C air. It is supposed to be beneficial for boosting the immune system and my smart watch told me it was the longest amount of deep sleep I'd ever had the night after my treatment.

Facilities also include free use of the gondola to Ice Q, the highest gourmet restaurant in the Alps (see Trendspotting on page 27-28) and a regular shuttle to and from the lifts for ski safaris and lessons (which can be arranged in advance). In summer, walks and yoga can be arranged with the hotel's own alpacas, along with mountain-bike hire and hiking suggestions.

ECO CREDENTIALS

Das Central collaborates with local producers, such as sourcing Ötztal spring fish from Raimund Mrak in Längenfeld, to support regional agriculture and reduce its environmental footprint.

ACCESSIBILITY

The hotel is wheelchair accessible with lifts to all areas and disabled parking close to the front door. **6**

RATES

Double rooms from €250 per person per night in winter, based on two people sharing on a half-board basis, including use of the spa facilities. central-soelden.com

IMAGES: DAS CENTRAL