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The powdery tops of Mount Titlis attract a growing number of people.

A well-known **SECRET**

In the heart of Switzerland, in the shadows of Mount Titlis lays one of the Alps' best freeskiing resorts, Engelberg. The popularity of the resort is increasing as more and more people venture off-piste.

\ Antti Laiho 📷 Mattias Fredriksson

The change in skiing culture is obvious in places like Engelberg. Ten years ago it was mostly young, tough freeskiers who enjoyed the powdery

glaciers on the 3,238-meter high Mount Titlis. Today there are a lot more people. The change in equipment has made powder skiing more accessible than ever. With floaty wide skis you don't need the skills and power of the old days. You can cruise some serious terrain with ease. Also the safety equipment, like the airbag backpack, helmets and back protectors have helped the weekend warriors.

"Powder has become democratized", confirms **Eric Sponberg**, a local hotel owner. Sponberg knows exactly what he is talking about. Ten years ago the Swede was a young freeskiier, who spent his winters touring freeskiing contests in the Alps. He chose Engelberg as his base and met like-minded friends there.

One of the new friends was **Niklas Möller**, another Swedish freeskiier. They both went to University in the off-season to study business and enjoyed the Alps in the winter. In 2005 they completed their studies and faced new challenges: Niklas started to work for a real estate investment firm in London and Eric joined an advertising agency in Stockholm.

A few years later, in 2008, Niklas went on a weekend trip to his lost paradise in the Alps. He found out that a small run-down hotel was for sale and contacted his friend in Sweden.

"Niklas called me and asked if I was tired of my office job", Eric recalls. They got together and discussed the situation thoroughly.

"Engelberg was becoming huge in Scandinavia for its freeskiing possibilities and we saw that there could be an interesting niche for us in the market. We had a lot of friends who loved skiing and ski culture but didn't want to stay in hostels anymore. It was still about ski-

ing, but they also wanted nice food and wine and good service."

The duo took the risk and opened Ski Lodge Engelberg ready for the next winter season.

Huge amounts of snow

The story of the two new hotel owners and their business reflects well what is happening at the resort: First of all Engelberg is a place for skiing. But the clientele has changed a bit. Engelberg is not only a place for hard-core freeskiers anymore. It is a place to enjoy skiing in nature - and somewhere to take pleasure in good service.

Titlis, Engelberg's main ski area, has a 2,000-meter vertical drop and gets huge amounts of snow every winter. Titlis is the first 3,000-meter peak the weather systems coming from the north hit when reaching the Alps. And that means snow, lots of snow. Engelberg is a regular name in the Alps' snow depth rankings' top three.

Skiing in Engelberg takes place on both sides of the valley. Titlis is on the north facing side and Brunni, a smaller and easier ski area, is facing south. The northern aspect makes the snow on Titlis stay cold and the ski season long. Last winter many parts of the Alps, especially in France, were suffering with very limited snow. Engelberg didn't have that problem. The early season was the best in 40 years and the run down to the valley had the earliest opening on record, at the end of October.

"And it kept on snowing until Christmas. Then there was a four or five week dry spell. But after that some snow fell maybe every other week. The rest of the Alps didn't see that snow. The snowfalls were very localized and we were lucky. In mid-March we still had 350 centimeters of snow on the glacier", says Eric Sponberg.

"During the past ten years the weather fronts have mostly come from the north. We cross our fingers that it is going to stay that way!"

Just go skiing

The most characteristic thing about skiing in Engelberg is the enormous area for easily accessible off-piste skiing. There is really no need to hike or climb



Ski Lodge is for those skiers who appreciate good food and service.

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IN ALPS'
SNOW DEPTH
RANKING.**



SKIING TEN THOUSAND METERS OF VERTICAL IN A DAY IS DOABLE – PROVIDED YOUR LEGS CAN HANDLE IT.



at all to reach amazing runs down the glacier-covered mountain sides. Skiing ten thousand meters of vertical in one day is doable – provided your legs can handle it.

Titlis is a big mountain and skiing on it makes you feel small. The cliffs, rocks and glaciers add their challenges to the

mix. The most famous run in Engelberg is called Laub.

“It is as if God made the perfect off-piste run: 35 degrees, 3 kilometers wide, 1,000 meter vertical drop. Laub is just amazing right after a snowfall”, Eric Spongberg describes the most famous run on his home mountain.

Laub is no news for hardcore freeskiers or locals. It is visible from the valley and, easy to get to and it gets skied a lot. But Laub is big and has huge amounts of ski terrain.

Another famous off-piste run on Titlis is called Galtiberg. It is a long, remote and spectacular run down from the very

top of the ski area. It takes skiers down the backside of Titlis over glaciers and above several hundred meter high cliffs to Führenalp at the end of the valley.

Engelberg is not the right place for over-curious exploration. With steep, vast glaciers, cliffs and long top-to-bottom runs it is possible to make mistakes

and end up in trouble. A mountain guide or strong local knowledge is recommended for many areas.

An easier alternative waits on the other side of the valley. The sunny Brunni ski area is a lot smaller than Titlis and more suitable for families, beginners and intermediate skiers.

Skiing at Brunni is relaxing experience. “Brunni is cozy. It has nice huts, where you can have a great lunch. Ski down to a barn and have a cheese fondue”, suggests Spongberg.

But despite the first appearance, Brunni also has some very, very good spots for freeskiers too. Especially during big storms it is just the right place to go to in Engelberg. Trees and lower altitude make visibility better.

But when skiing at Brunni you have to beware that some terrain is off-limits: skiing between the trees is not allowed. The closed areas are the protected habitat for the chamois, small mountain goats.

“But skiing on the open fields is allowed and can be very good. I’ve had some of my best powder days at Brunni.”

Some of the most adventurous Brunni tree skiing can be found in the Hinterwald and Grünenwald forests. The runs start at the very top of Brunni and go down to the valley past Engelberg. For the return trip the skiers used to take the train, but after a new railway tunnel was built, they have to take a taxi.

Take a train!

The trains are an integral part of getting around in the Swiss Alps. They make places like Engelberg easily accessible: from Zürich airport it takes only two hours to get to Engelberg. The train leaves according to schedule and arrives right on time at its destination – just like a reliable Swiss watch.

The easy access and close proximity to the metropolitan area of Zürich can make Engelberg crowded on weekends. You can end up in a 45-minute queue if you are at the base station at 9.15 on a Saturday in February. But the crowds are big only during high season in February and March and on weekends. Other than that, there is plenty of powder to be discovered at other times.



“Engelberg is still a niche spot compared to the big, famous resorts”, says Spongberg.

Sounds like Spongberg’s Ski Lodge and Engelberg are a perfect match. Both serve the same clientele enjoying the democratized, fluffy powder snow. ■



Precise information

When you are skiing at high altitude, precise information is essential for safety. The new Suunto Elementum Terra All Black is equipped with all the essentials for survival in the outdoors, such as an altimeter for altitude measurement, barometer for easy prediction of weather changes, and compass for navigation. It provides all the information needed for confident, safe, and exciting exploration of the great outdoors.