

Thrills on the awesome Titlis

Powderhounds should head to the valley town of Engelberg for big-mountain fun, says **Leslie Woit**

“The Titlis is frightening and very high,” wrote Abbot Plazidus in 1650 of Engelberg’s signature peak. Since the 12th century, Benedictine monks including Plazidus have lived in the shadow of this awesome mountain under the maxim *ora et labora* – pray and work.

If they were praying for snow, their prayers were answered. The sleepy end-of-the-valley belle époque town of Engelberg is chock-full of powder-filled off-piste opportunities and home to one of the world’s biggest vertical drops.

The town is launching its winter campaign this year with some great free offers to lure visitors who might be anxious about the current strength of the Swiss franc.

Women will be able to ski for free from January 14-21, 2012 and during Easter week, from April 9-13, 2012, Engelberg’s ski schools will be offering free ski or snowboard tuition for children and teenagers (visit www.engelberg.ch/ladiesweek and www.engelberg.ch/kidsweek for more information).

A HEAD-SPINNER

The first revolving cable-car in the world, the Titlis Rotair, was constructed in 1992 to better serve Engelberg’s committed powderhounds. Thanks to the Rotair and a raft of equally impressive modern lifts, Engelberg’s skiing takes place on both sides of the valley, each served by two separate lift systems reached by a free shuttle bus.

On the Titlis side, the Trübsee lake is traversed by chairlift in both directions and you can eat, drink or sleep overnight in the Igloo Village built on the edge of the large plateau. A good choice of red runs above the treeline fans out from the western peak of Jochstock, also the location of a terrain park.

Beneath the Trübsee, both red and blue back-to-village runs pass a huge cross-country ski circuit whose peaceful fir-lined tracks are definitely worth an afternoon’s excursion. Make sure you save some energy for that last run home: it carries on for a thigh-burning 7.5 miles.

A CUT ABOVE

Engelberg’s most renowned attraction has to be The Laub, one of the Alps’ great off-piste descents. This baby rolls on, on and then on a bit more for an incredible 3,940ft of (often) deep powder



thrills. From about the mid-station of the Titlis right down to the bottom, where you can celebrate with a drink at The Ritz (no relation to the chic London hotel), the run is the width of a few football fields and set at a perfect constant 35-40 degree pitch. It’s heaven, just as the resort tagline claims.

The Galtiberg is another scorcher of an off-piste adventure, considerably more involved than The Laub. Your guide will lead you across a few traverses and between the odd

cliff band. It’s classic big-mountain skiing.

For fun, stop for lunch and glühwein at the mid-mountain Igloo Village, then test your internal clock on the Speed Stretch at Jochpass: it will help you appreciate the skill of the World Cup ski jumpers who fly through the sky at speed here in January.

Over on the Brunni side, there is a smaller selection of runs that are good for intermediate sunny skiing and for tree skiing when the weather obscures visibility on Titlis. There’s also a new children’s ski area opening this winter.

CHURCH AND CHEESE After skiing, slip into your snowboots and join a guided tour of the Benedictine

High life: clockwise from top, the Titlis Rotair; the terrace at Titlis Station; fun at the snowXpark; snowshoeing on the mountain

“Engelberg’s renowned attraction is The Laub, one of the Alps’ great descents

Monastery and its splendid baroque church, with altar artwork by Spiegler and the largest pipe organ in Switzerland, then nibble your way through a fascinating cheese-making demonstration.

Of course, there is much more on offer in Engelberg than just church and cheese. This will be the second season for snowXpark, a one-of-a-kind playground for snowXbikes and snowXmobiles.

Youths (and adults) from 10 years and up can ride these new electric snowmobiles, a licence to rip, burn, and peel with impunity. Two new snowshoe trails open this winter, each 1.5 miles long.

For a special evening of alpine atmosphere, ride up to 9,840ft to the Panorama Restaurant atop Mount Titlis

and be treated to dinner amid hundreds of candles and nearly as many fondue forks.

Back down in the town, many skiers are tucked up in bed early in anticipation of another quality Engelberg big-mountain morning – but where there’s a Swede there’s a way.

Party animals can try The Yucatan on the ground floor of the Bellevue Hotel, alleged to sell more beer than any other bar in the whole of central Switzerland. Or The Spindle, which can’t be far behind.

Or better still, just ask the first tall blonde you meet in the street. This is Engelberg, and there’s an angel around every corner.

More information: www.engelberg.ch