14-TRAVEL AUSTRIA **AUSTRIA TRAVEL - 15** LondonStudent LondonStudent www.london-student.net · 28th January 2008 www.london-student.net · 28th January 2008

Just remember to keep your weight forward

Jo Caird goes to Kirchberg in the Austrian alps to try her hand at snowboarding and discovers that it's harder than it looks, in every sense of the word

Last weekend the Austrian resort of Italian restaurants make the town a Kitzbühel was the place to be for the international ski community. Over 150,000 people flooded into the tiny medieval town for one of the most important events of the competition the 68th Annual Hahnenkamm Race. Starting at an altitude of 1,665m altitude and ending at 802m in almost the out to be frog spawn. Liam assures us centre of town, the downhill race is said to be one of the most challenging in the world due to the course, which sees competitors fully

Kitzbühel is much more than a couple of terrifying races however. The region boasts 168km of groomed pistes, plenty of off-piste opportunities and a separate mountain dedicated to snowboard antics: the Kitzbüheler Horn. As the excitement for the Hahnenkamm began to build, I arrived in Kirchberg, Kitzbühel's smaller and considerably less swanky neighbour to see what the place had to

We flew into Salzburg, Kitzbühel's nearest airport, and were met by a representative of Topdeck, the agency that organised our trip. An hour's winding drive through picturesque alpine forest brought us to Kirchberg and Haus Christian, our home for the next week. New Zealander Liam spent the journey telling us about the revelry awaiting us: the house is staffed by nine young people, most of whom are Australian, and all are there to keep us entertained, whether by supplying us with ski and snowboard equipment, cooking for us, or – perhaps the most important role of all – keeping up an a

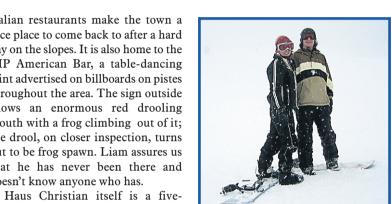
nice place to come back to after a hard day on the slopes. It is also home to the VIP American Bar, a table-dancing joint advertised on billboards on pistes throughout the area. The sign outside shows an enormous red drooling mouth with a frog climbing out of it; the drool, on closer inspection, turns that he has never been there and doesn't know anyone who has.

minute walk from the centre of town, always easily locatable (even after one too many shots of Jägermeister) due to its proximity to the kirch (church) that gives the town its name. The chalet around 45 guests at maximum capacity, most of them in four-bed dorms, but while living space is obviously limited, and showers and toilets are shared, the house is spotless and the showers always hot.

The price of a week's accommodation includes continental breakfasts and four evening meals, eaten with your fellow guests. It may not be to



but there is certainly something to be said for getting home, showering and dragging one's aching body straight to







Clockwise from left: view of Kirchberg from the Fleckalmbahn gondola; summit of the Fleckalmbahn gondola: the author and boyfriend: the Igloo Village; Kirchberg's famous kirch; a chairlift over the Winterwanderweg walking trail; one of the area's many 'umbrella' bars in the sunshine

arrival at Haus Christian so the next and consider myself competent if morning we lost no time in getting to technically poor, but have always been seemingly never-ending supply of supper without having to plan Kitzbuhuler Horn to meet our jealous of my boarder brother, so thought that now was the time to balance things out. The plan was that I would take to it very quickly and soon be proficient at both sports, able company and resort conditions. The other reason was that this way my haus boasts one of the nicer views. and I could learn at the same time, able to eat our hearty Austrian lunch thus spending some quality time on the huge sun terrace and look over instructor Gail for the first of three together. That isn't quite how it all

worked out, but I'll get to that later. After forking out 180 each for a six-day lift pass (which covers the

priced restaurants and bars dotted practically every major run, but Alpenthe regular live lunch-time accordion weren't pushing ourselves too hard. Except that in snowboarding you never know when you're going to fall, staff, but no one batted an eyelid. No even on a shallow slope, going very schadenfreude here. They say you know when you've broken a bone, but I had no idea - I a plaster on my fractured and was just stunned by the pain. Wailing like a child I was escorted back to the

company by a black labrador (Gail's trail that connects the summits of the faithful companion) must have been a main gondolas. Fleckalmbahn and ridiculous sight for the restaurant Hahnenkammbahn (where there is

Eight hours later I was back at the chalet with the unwelcome addition of dislocated wrist. No more snowboarding fun for me. In September my

late nineteenth-century). My fellow walkers were mainly old ladies with yappy dogs and attractive young parents with expensive prams, but everyone was clearly enjoying themselves in the afternoon sunshine. Accessible via the trail is an 'Igloo Village', a small collection of real igloos including a 'wellness igloo with infrared cabin'. Everything was locked when I visited but during specified periods you can stay in one of the sleeping igloos at the igloo hotel (99 pppn or 145 pppn for a bed in a VIP Igloo), drink at the igloo bar or even undergo shaman baptism at the igloo church. The open-air bar is full of skiers and boarders throughout the day, lounging in deckchairs and drinking beers and Jägermeister. I was never able to forget my irritation at not being able to ski or

also a small free museum stuffed with

photographs and equipment from the

beginning of skiing in the area in the

great weather did dampen my envy enough to let me enjoy myself. Aprèsski is not quite the same when you haven't done any skiing but staying in a chalet with a group of people all of whom are having a great time means that the atmosphere is always positive. A serious injury has to have an enormous effect on a winter sports holiday, but certain things enable you to make the most out of a bad situation. People kept asking if I would be put off boarding or skiing in the future and the answer is certainly not. With a region as big and as reasonably priced as Kitzbühel awaiting me, as soon as my physio is over, I'll be back. And next time hopefully I'll get off the nursery slopes.

board, but beautiful surroundings and There are in fact a whole host of activities on offer in the Kitzbühel ski region in addition to the usual ones. The guys at Haus Christian will organise night skiing, rodelling (tobogganing to you and me), iceskating on the frozen Schwarzsee

TRAVEL INFO

Io Caird travelled to Austria with travel adventure specialist Topdeck Travel (www.topdecktravel.co.uk).

A 6/7 day stay in the ski resort of Kirchberg in the Tyrolean valley is from £259 per person, excluding flights, ski hire and lift passes. The price includes hotel accommodation, breakfast daily and 4 group dinners. Topdeck can arrange a lift pass for the entire stay at £135; skis and boot hire at £85 and ski school training over 5 days at £105 per person. To book email: res@topdecktravel.co.uk, telephone 08452575411. Topdeck Travel also runs ski breaks to Andorra,

Many budget airlines fly to Salzburg, Munich and Innsbruck, which are not too far from the resort.

A hot lunch at a mountain lodgecosts around 10, with similar prices in Kirchberg. Fondue at the Sporthotel will set you back 19.50 per person (min two people). A large beer is 3-3.50, while a glüwein (mulledwine) cost 4-4.50.

For more information on the Igloo Village, visit alpeniglu.com

Overseas report

different study or work abroad experience, direct from London students on their year abroad. From Paris to Panama City, from Berlin to Beijing, they tell you what it means to live in a different culture, whether far away or close to home. In this issue, Kim Cranshaw reports on life in Bangkok, Thailand.

Upon discovering that a uniform was to be part of my university experience in Bangkok I physically shuddered. The last time I wore a uniform I was 16 and the ensemble was maroon and baggy. As a teen of the 90s, I had always envied the short, sophisticated summer dress uniform of the girls from Neighbours.

Really, I should have known. Uniform is something of a Thai obsession. It seems that everyone here has a uniform of some kind whether official or otherwise. The police in Bangkok dress in tight fitting brown fatigues that state that they mean business; the complete opposite of the flailing florescent of the British force. Within Thai society, appearance is extremely important. It is a rare occurrence to spot a filthy or reeking Thai. Uniforms here re-establish the importance of looking smart and identifiable whatever your profession.

Regarding the university uniform

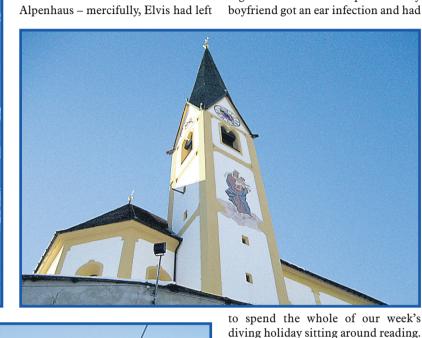
my initial horror swiftly turned to

delight when I discovered that it was

more Neighbours than nasty; fitted

white shirt, snappy belt, split skirt and...the crème de la crème...stilettos! Adherence to the uniform is only required during the examination period. However, a fellow international student and I found ourselves cramming in as much wear as possible; a trip to the convenience store, meeting a friend for coffee or a trip to the post office were all occasion enough to don 'that little number'. It wasn't just the utter suaveness that drew us into sporting our unnecessary costume; it was also the way in which Thai people reacted to it. For example, the fruit seller no longer tried to overcharge us, the once silent taxi driver vakked our ears off and the police even stopped traffic for us (a film star moment if ever I've had one). The uniform differentiated us from the farang (westerners), of whom many Thai have a negative opinion, the farang-kii-nok (bird-sh*t westerner) in particular. Most of this category can be found on Bangkok's infamous Khao San Road: baggy fisherman pants, badly dreadlocked hair, wife beater vest and occasionally, bare feet. The Thais view these people as lackhold them in low esteem. Thais constantly judge people's

appearances. Chubby-as-children adults are still called uwan (fat) as a "cute" nickname and a street vendor is as likely to comment on the appearance of an overweight businessman as a buxom blonde. So, whilst wearing a uniform in Thailand is common, it is the art of observing a person's appearance that is truly Thai 'uniform behaviour.'



Now it was my turn.

(Black Lake), trips to local ice-hockey

matches, and curling. Unfortunately

my condition prevented me from

doing most of these things and the

weather and sporting calendar made

the others a no-no. Reports from the

chalet staff and other guests however

testify that there is much fun to be

had, although both rodelling and

night skiing are fairly hazardous, often

resulting in injuries. Even the most

hardcore of the boarders there, men

who think nothing of trekking with

snow shoes for three hours through

snow-filled forest to find virgin

powder on which to make their mark,

admit that hurtling drunk down an icy

slope in the dark on a device with no

So while my uninjured boyfriend

was able to explore some of

Kitzbühel's 1705 acres of runs - stick-

ing to the blues for the most part - I

had to find other things to do.

Although obviously designed for

steering mechanism is dangerous.



staff) cost 60 per person per day or 150 for three days. One-on-one lessons are 70 per day. The first day our group comprised my boyfriend and I and two other beginners from Haus Christian, so progress was quick, but when other boarders of different levels arrived on the following days, standards deteriorated. If you have the cash and want to waste as little time as possible, then one-on-one is a good way to go.

Lessons were 10am-12pm and 1pm-

3pm with an hour's break for lunch at the Alpenhaus at the top of the main Kitzbüheler Horn gondola. Alpenhaus is just one of the many reasonablythroughout the ski area. You'll find onto the expanse of shining white spreading out below us. Tuesdays are Happy Horn Day (we seemed to be the found this funny), an event which sees man in an oversized white jacket



Although not yet expert, we were both picking things up reasonably fast and had managed to do some not too embarrassing turns. We decided it was time to try the blue piste that runs from the Alpenhaus back to the nursery slope where we had thus far spent all our time. Gail agreed that we were capable, gave us some tips and left us to it. In Austria blue is the

my case, those who are forced into) It was all going splendidly until the the hospital in Kitzbühel. A sleeping gentler pursuits. afternoon of our third day of lessons. tear-stained woman being kept The Winterwanderweg is a walking

skiers and boarders, there are areas of me from the pain of my heavily the floor with a bag of snow on my the Kitzbühel mountains that are bruised coccyx, but everyone loves wrist until a strange enough swelling accessible to those who prefer (or in

Wailing like a child I was taken back to the Alpenhaus

The chalet is staffed by nine young people, all of them there solely to keep us entertained

shots and shooters.

While Kitzbühel is home to designer boutiques, five-star hotels and Russian women in fur and diamonds, Kirchberg, just a 20-minute bus-ride away, is much like any other ski resort town. A smattering of ski and snowboard shops, lots of cosy places for après-ski fun, several latenight bars for après-après-ski fun and a few reasonably-priced Austrian and

Arguably the best thing about the days of lessons. The fact that Topdeck chalet however is that there is an easy offer this service in-house, at the same (if very long) piste which runs from the centre of the ski area and finishes 2 minutes from the front door, removing the hassle of catching the ski-bus from other points in the valley.

were organised in a mercifully speedy 15 minutes on the evening of our

price as the large rental shops, is one of the biggest advantages of booking with the company. For anyone who has felt the frustration of wasting your first morning on the slopes dealing Our hired snowboards and boots with paperwork in a rental place, the

Haus Christian system is a winner.

entire Kitzbühel area, as well as giving free access to the region's ski bus network, which runs services frequently throughout the day) we impersonator named Colin. Hearing a began the 20-minute gondola ascent to the Horn to learn the basics of emblazoned with multi-coloured I've been skiing for over ten years snowboarding on the nursery slopes of musical notes sing along to a tinny