



The high life

More mountain retreats, skis optional

Almdorf Seinerzeit, Austria

Perched on a hillside high above the valley floor, Almdorf consists of 28 wooden chalets clustered around an inn and a pond. Oil lamps light the footpaths, wood smoke puffs from the chimneys. It looks like nothing has changed for centuries but in fact it's an illusion – Almdorf was built less than 20 years ago as an idealised recreation of the Alpine hamlet. In practice this means that the chalets look ancient (down to their stone roof tiles and wooden gutters) but inside are spacious and well equipped. Most have wood-fired outdoor hot tubs and many have ingeniously concealed mod-cons: tug on an antique pulley and a flatscreen television rises from a wooden dresser, lift a wooden step in the bathroom

to reveal a chilled cabinet full of champagne bottles. The tiny ski area of Falkert is a couple of miles up the road, while larger Bad Kleinkirchheim is 10 minutes' drive away. Numerous other activities on offer include snowshoeing, visiting thermal baths, cross-country skiing, walking and curling. *Chalets for two from €380; www.almdorf.com*

Whitepod, Switzerland

An encampment of 15 dome tents pitched amid the snow at 1400m, Whitepod offers a unique mountain experience. Camping here is not roughing it – the tents have sheepskin rugs, wood-burning stoves, fully-equipped bathrooms and large windows giving far-reaching views over the Rhone valley. There are two

chalets nearby, one housing a breakfast room and bar, the other the restaurant and a sauna, both beautifully decorated and full of books on the area. There is some skiing here – two private lifts are at guest's disposal – but also snowshoeing, dog-sledding, walking, wine and chocolate tasting. *Pods for two from SFr360 (£255); www.whitepod.com*



Breakfast at Almdorf Seinerzeit

Sextantio Santo Stefano, Italy

Not in the Alps, but in the Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga national park in the Apennines, Santo Stefano is a fortified medieval hilltop village at 1,250m. After years of depopulation, during the past decade it has been brought back to life as an "albergo diffuso" – a hotel in which the 28 rooms are in restored original houses, scattered around the village. The ski lifts at Campo Imperatore are about 20 miles away but guests can also walk, go wolf-watching, tour the area's numerous historic villages, churches, castles and craft and food shops, or just relax in the spa. *Doubles from €75; www.sextantio.it*

Tom Robbins