

Refueling at the slope-side Cabane Mont Fort Photo: Adrien Rodriguez

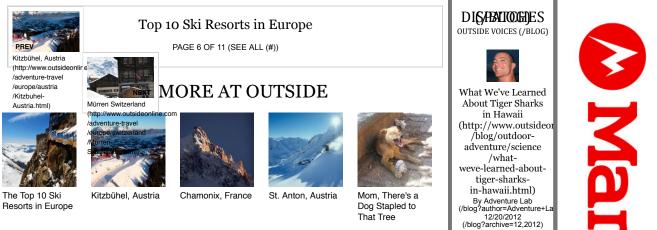
This French-speaking ski town in the western part of Switzerland gives Chamonix a run for its money in terms of lift-accessed steeps. What it lacks in terms of hardcore ski alpinism, it makes up for in style, world-class amenities, and convenience. The hotels, restaurants, and nightlife are sophisticated and polished—Richard Branson opened a chic chalet-hotel here called the **Lodge**

(http://www.thelodge.virgin.com/). The lifts are fast and offer easy access to 254-miles of slopes and off-piste zones like Bec des Rosses, a hairy, roughly 50-degree face accessed from the Mont Fort tram. If you want to tackle the Bec, or partake in any other off-pisting, hire Mauro Soregaloli or Stan Aunan. The two standout guides work at Adrenaline

(http://www.adrenaline-verbier.ch/), the best ski school in Verbier. After slaying Verbier's steeps, grab a sausage and sit outside on the deck slope-side at Cabane Mont Fort (http://www.cabanemontfort.ch/) before ordering a Carlsberg at Pub Mont Fort (http://www.pubmontfort.com/) in town. If you're itching for a big night, head to the Farm Club, a disco where you'll rub shoulders with ski bums and European aristocrats alike. For something low key, hit the Fer à Cheval, a bar popular with locals. Stay at the centrally located Hotel Farinet (http://www.hotelfarinet.com/), which doubles after dark as a Bedouin-inspired nightclub (from \$143, December – April).

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