

Little Skis IN LECH



When it came to picking the perfect destination for her little one to take his first steps on the icy slopes, it was an easy decision for Rowena Carr-Alison

The first time I came to Oberlech three years ago, my son was three months old, but I knew that this was the place I wanted him to take his first steps on skis. I'm not sure what it was about it that had me smitten, but it seemed that this was the perfect place for Lennox to have his first ski school experience. Fast forward three years, and my intuition was right.

Could it be the fact that this chic ski resort high up in the Alps has long been a favourite of the jet-set and Royals? Could it be because Princess Diana used to grace the slopes here with her boys, once upon a time?

The set-up in Oberlech, 1,706 metres high, is ideal for families with little ones. Firstly, it's traffic-free, so you don't have to worry about a toddler accidentally skiing into oncoming traffic or, indeed, breaking free and heading for a busload of tourists. It



also makes for a much prettier, more picturesque village and is quieter to boot.

The family-run Goldener Berg Hotel facilities are second to none. Perched at the top of the village, the family-friendly hotel is a beautiful mix of traditional style and contemporary cool design. The owner, Daniela Pfefferkorn, is charming and welcoming, and from the local dynasty of Pfefferkorns, who own a lot of the businesses in the valley in Lech.

Where to start? Our favourite spots were the sundeck terrace (ideal for breakfast in the sun, a coffee break, or barbecue lunch), the heated pool (perfect for some downtime post-skiing) and the Kids' Club, where the lovely Lisa kept the kids busy with baking cookies, building train sets, art projects and even fed them dinner while the grown-ups had a little 'us' time. The family suite provided us with a cosy home

from home, with an en-suite bedroom for Lennox, bathroom with locally produced toiletries, an overflowing fruit platter and very comfy beds – not to mention the fantastic mountain views. Perched on top of the world, the vistas are simply breathtaking and relaxing.

Breakfasts were plentiful and delicious, with a selection of baked goods, cheeses, ham and smoked salmon, as well as fresh fruit, juices and yoghurts of all kinds. In addition to which, one could order any manner of eggs, and rather tasty Nutella-filled pancakes topped with icing sugar. Just what the doctor ordered before a day on the slopes!

With the half-board set-up, we dined amidst the timber-clad walls of the 500-year-old Gault Millau Johannesstübli. On the menu was cheese soufflé, broccoli cream soup, chicken with ratatouille, ravioli and wild mushrooms, followed by an impressive Alpine cheeseboard and a lovely light and rather exotic carpaccio of coconut and pineapple.

The three other restaurants are just as cosy thanks to the recent revamp, all warm red checks and velvets. The views, every which way, are stunning.

The hotel goes the extra mile to provide you with activities, popping a *Berg Post* on the table each day, covering local activities, the gym's schedule and the weather for the day. There's also a weekly printout of events in Lech and a Kids' Club programme.

Andrea and Katja on reception are also on hand to provide maps, info and ski passes for a full or half day, as well as 'Snowbear' daily €10 passes for the kids. A quick 10-minute walk down to the ski school, and Lennox was in safe hands with Hannah and Sarah. The timber chalet is a kids' paradise, with a playroom packed with Lego, trains and toys of all kinds for an hour-long play before hitting the snow. Then, the kids head out into their learning zone, complete with 'magic carpet' and gentle slope to learn the ropes. Parents are encouraged to leave the kids to it, and on Day One, we were delighted to pick up our son with his very first medal! Although the day had been long, he was happy to go up to the top of the mountain with his parents for an experimental ski down a blue slope!

Day Two was a little tougher, with Lennox having separation blues, but he was soon back on his skis, getting on with the business of ploughing. For €10, the two girls take the kids to the next door Sonnenburg Hotel's beautiful sundeck for a kid's meal, before returning for another play and ski ahead of the 3pm pick-up. This time, Lennox didn't want to leave. Although you can't be there to watch your child's every move, during the week, the ski school put together a CD of

'The hotel goes the extra mile to provide you with activities'

over 100 photos – a lovely memento of their week's work to take home.

Back at the hotel, the Kids' Club fun starts back at 4pm. Their room is a riot of primary colours with board games, beads, paints, dressing-up costumes, a TV, train set and more. There are also trips organised to the local bowling alley or giant

domino trails on the outside deck.

While the kids are entertained, as the evening draws in, adults can hit the Alpine Spa, in the dressing gowns and slippers provided. Actually, it turns out toddlers enjoy a dip in the alfresco Jacuzzi too.

To indulge, the Goldener Berg's Alpine Spa menu is packed with enticing massages, from Almstern Marmot Oil massages to a muscle relaxing Sports massage. You'll also find a selection of facials, beauty treatments and more obscure Kinesio Taping, Curd Wraps or Ice Stretch Spraying, which sounds chilly but interesting.

On his last day, I left Lennox in the capable hands of Max, another instructor blessed with language skills and a great sense of humour. He seemed like a pro at handling the kids and I left a happy little snow bunny practising his 'pizzas' with his new friend. With just three kids in the group today, he was getting plenty of quality learning time.

A few hours later, I was delighted to hear that Lennox was 'getting the hang of it' and wasn't keen to leave. He even came down the gentle slope by himself. A proud mum indeed. It's such a shame we now have to wait another year before hitting the snow again. Let's just hope that some of the skills stand the test of time and stick until next season.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT The family-run Goldener Berg Hotel facilities are second to none; The new lounge and bar area; Comfy beds to fall into after a hard day on the slopes; Lennox soon got the hang of skiing

● *Hotel Goldener Berg*, +43 (0)5583 22050, goldenerberg.at
From €101 per person, per night, based on two sharing a studio, including breakfast.
Up to €421 for one bedroom suite and separate living room with double sofa bed, for two kids, including breakfast.
Up to €502 for a family suite with two bedrooms for four, including breakfast.

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