

From the kitchen to the slopes

The chef and ski instructor from Hopfgarten

14 to 16 hours a day, seven days a week. For 34 years. What to many sounds like pure stress, is for Patrick Ager (54) a way of combining his two biggest passions: cooking and skiing. At half seven in the morning he serves up breakfast for guests staying in Gasthof Oberbräu – then the apron is swapped for a ski jacket. Five minutes later Patrick is standing at the Salvenbahn valley station in Hopfgarten, welcoming those taking part in his beginner’s ski course.

From here it is straight up to the Hohe Salve (1829 m) – incidentally, the loveliest viewing mountain in the Kitzbühel Alps – and those who want to, can filter into a variety-packed network covering a total of around 275 kilometres of slopes. ‘Even for beginners and families, SkiWelt Wilder Kaiser – Brixental with its many and varied options available, is ideal’, says Patrick. After finishing his day as a ski instructor, he himself has no more time for the pistes. By 15.30 at the latest the 54-year-old has to don his apron again and be at the stove.

From kitchen to piste – from piste to kitchen. This has been daily life for this born-and-bred Hopfgartner for over 30 years now. It was at the age of 19 that he first helped out as a ski instructor. ‘I thought I’d just give it a go. If it doesn’t suit me, I can leave it.’ In any event, he had enough to do at the time in his parents’ business, which has been family-run for more than 100 years.

But it did suit. After qualifying as a ski instructor, he went to Australia for a few seasons before taking over the family business at the age of 25. Time to step back as a ski instructor? Quite the contrary. In 2009 Patrick, together with three colleagues and friends, set up Skischule Alpin, also in his hometown of Hopfgarten. ‘Since that time, every day has become a little less plannable’, he laughs. After all, he has to jump in when need arises. And just like today for instance, spontaneously take a beginner’s course between breakfast and dinner.

But summer is indeed more relaxed. This outdoor enthusiast then uses his free time to go cycling. ‘We have fantastic bike routes here in the Kitzbühel Alps.’ Patrick’s tip: the Salvenradrunde, which proceeds via Hopfgarten, Itter, Ellmau and Kirchberg, once around the Hohe Salve, and takes around three hours. If he hasn’t had enough, he rides from Hopfgarten up to Alpengasthof Rigi, parks up his bike here and hikes the final kilometre and a half, with 300 metres ascent, up to the summit of the Hohe Salve. It is here that he takes in the 360-degree panorama across the Bavarian Prealps and the Wilder Kaiser, across the summits of the Hohe Tauern and Zillertal Alps. And a cool beer in the summit restaurant.

In spite of the additional free time in the summer months, Patrick prefers winter, he needs the structure and the pressure. ‘For me it is positive stress’, he says. There is no risk of burn-out, despite his 100-hour weeks. ‘I reckon depression is the result of a lack of validation of your own work. And when life is all about things being ‘faster, higher, further’.’ In contrast, Patrick’s credo is: pragmatism and cordiality.

Therefore, every evening he does the rounds in the inn, exchanging a few words with everyone. Asking whether the food has been nice (Patrick's recommendation - the 'Schweinsstelzen' [ham hock]), what people have been doing during the day and if they are enjoying their stay. 'That's how so many of the gastronomes here in the region tick. The people here are personable, which makes the area special and sets us apart from many other well-known ski destinations. That's just normal for us here' says Patrick – hanging up his apron on the hook, marking the end of his day.

Hohe Salve region: The Hohe Salve region brings together town and country. Wörgl which has 14,000 inhabitants, shopping options, restaurants and cafés, is regarded as the gateway to the Kitzbühel Alps. The towns of Hopfgarten, Itter, Kelchsau, Angath, Angerberg, Mariastein and Kirchbichl each have their own charm – with rural structures and plenty of romance in unspoilt natural surroundings, lovely inns and churches. Meanwhile skiers will be right in a piste paradise in Hopfgarten, Itter and Kelchsau.

Your guest ticket is also your train and S-Bahn ticket: All holidaymakers in the four Kitzbühel Alp regions can use a valid guest card for transport in the local area. It can be used on trains (REX) and S-Bahn services, on the Wörgl to Hochfilzen route.

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