

COUNTRY & TOWN HOT HOUSE

A LIFE IN BALANCE

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CANDY CRUSH

Dafne Keen is oh so sweet and serious

THE QUEEN

An icon like no other

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HOOFFING IT

Nigel Tisdall heads to St Moritz to discover why its annual snow polo tournament is the ultimate destination for HNWs in the know



The ice on St Moritz's lake has to be 50cm thick for the annual Snow Polo World Cup



Polo originated over 2,000 years ago at the Persian royal court, so why is it being played on a frozen lake 1,800m up in the Swiss Alps?

The answer is 71-year-old Reto Gaudenzi, a charismatic player from St Moritz who disliked having to ‘wait for the summer’ to jump on a polo pony. In 1985 the hotelier launched a winter tournament on the lake by convincing Cartier to chip in CHF 100,000 of sponsorship to which Pommery added a thousand bottles of Champagne. Today, this prestigious event is the pinnacle of the international snow polo circuit with a CHF 2.5m budget. In January [2022] it drew a record 22,000 spectators to watch six teams compete over three days for nothing more than ‘a trophy and the glory.’

It’s an exhilaratingly crazy spectacle for sure, as ponies charge across 50cm thick ice in pursuit of a bright red ball, throwing up clouds of snow against a backdrop of brilliant blue sky and the majestic peaks of the Engadin Valley. While general admission has always been free, serious partying takes place in a palatial VIP tent where day tickets cost up to €750, including a lavish lunch of lobster bisque, caviar and culinary delights prepared by Badrutt’s Palace Hotel.

A fair few of these HNW guests fly in by private jet to nearby Samedan, which is just a 75-minute hop from Farnborough and far preferable to taking a commercial flight to Zurich followed by a three-hour drive. ‘The pandemic changed the way people think about private aviation,’ explains Marine Eugène, European managing director for Flexjet, a key sponsor of the Snow Polo World Cup.

JET, SET, SNOW!

Four luxurious ways to see the world by private jet

SKIING IN ITALY

Avoid the crowds by private jetting into low-key Bolzano, the gateway to terrific skiing in the Dolomites at Val Gardena which is only an hour's drive away. A 90-minute flight with Victor from Northolt in a six-seater Phenom 300 costs from £30,000 return based on a week's stay, including a 200 per cent carbon offset that supports environmental projects in India, China and Cambodia. There is also an option to purchase sustainable aviation fuel when booking. flyvictor.com



Concerns about health, along with cutbacks by scheduled services, provided a new justification for jumping on a jet and it helps that many companies are now squaring up to sustainability issues with gusto – all Flexjet flights are offset by 300 percent to cover CO₂ emissions and other aviation pollutants with funds invested in multiple global projects, from wind farms in Turkey to distributing fuel-efficient stoves in Rwanda. Inevitably, once you've experienced the convenience, efficiency and glamour of PJs it can be hard to go back to conventional flying. 'And the party starts the minute you get on the plane,' Marine adds with a grin.

For all the floor-length furs, statement shades and show-off dogs, Reto's wintry chukkas remain sweetly low-key. Numbers on the scoreboard are changed by hand and there's no big screens so you'd better pay attention. The ponies sport special hoof-wear and the field is smaller than on grass, so you feel close to the action. True to form, the players are monstrously competitive with the après-polo just as energised – the smart money always stays in nearby Pontresina which remains delightfully traditional compared to blinged-up St Moritz. At its Grand Hotel Kronenhof, opened in 1898, a wintery decorum lives on in a pampering blizzard of fancy hot toddies and 80-minute Valmont facials. There's also the option to take an enchanting 90-minute walk over the snowy hills to reach the polo and, yes, the ceaseless Champagne that needs no chilling.

But what's next? Reto tells *Country & Town House* he can't increase the number of teams, or the length of the tournament, and the frozen lake can only bear so much weight – which only leaves one option. 'Up the prices!' he quips, ever the thoroughbred showman.

BOOK IT: The 38th Snow Polo World Cup St Moritz runs 27-29 January 2023 (snowpolo-stmoritz.com). Flexjet is a world-leading expert in private aviation and provides shared ownership and programmes for experienced users who fly more than 50 hours per year (flexjet.com). Grand Hotel Kronenhof has double rooms from CHF 615 including breakfast (kronenhof.com). For further information visit stmoritz.com



NORTHERN LIGHTS IN STYLE

Bag yourself an action-packed Arctic adventure flying direct from Biggin Hill to Alta in northern Norway on a shared Learjet 45. The eight-day trip with Travelcoup Deluxe, who specialise in package tours by private jet, includes exhilarating rides by snowmobile and dog sled, a fjord cruise with fishing and nights in cosy transparent igloos with a good chance of seeing the aurora borealis. From £8,341pp for eight days all-inclusive departing March 18, 2023. Carbon emissions are fully offset on all flights. travelcoupdeluxe.com

A-LIST ANTARCTICA

White Desert's Whichaway camp in Antarctica is a remote and luxurious outpost in the pristine wilds of Queen Maud Land that can be reached on a five-hour flight from Cape Town aboard a 13-seater Gulfstream G550. An eight-day all-inclusive tour departing January 18, 2023 costs from \$98,500pp including a visit to the South Pole and a 14,000-strong colony of Emperor penguins. Carbon offsets are included with funds supporting conservation and community projects in the Amazon rainforest. white-desert.com



GO FOR GREENLAND

VistaJet's Private World experiences include bespoke private jet trips to Greenland to join EYOS's expedition cruises aboard the luxurious 12-guest Nansen Explorer. Towering icebergs, abundant whales, heli-skiing trips and encounters with the traditional lifestyle of the Inuit are some of the thrills. A four-hour flight from Farnborough to Kangerlussuaq, on the west coast, costs from \$152,400 one-way including carbon offset. A seven-day all-inclusive voyage costs from €335,000. vistajet.com; eyos-expeditions.com ■