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LICENCE TO SKI –

ON BOND'S TRACKS THROUGH THE SNOW

The famous ski resort of Sölden is especially proud of one particular visitor: Bond. James Bond. None other than the world's longest-serving secret agent took to the slopes here in 2015 to do the spectacular shoot for *Spectre*, the most recent instalment in the Bond series.

Words by Derk Hoberg
Photos by iStock, Alamy,
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The famous film hero has now been honoured with a unique 007 museum at an altitude of over 3000 metres. But the alpine hotspot has far more to offer than just prominent visitors: optimal ski conditions until summertime, an exciting variety of ski runs, and culinary events that are in a class of their own.

Both the Bond films and the 146 kilometres of pistes in Sölden guarantee pure action. It's therefore perhaps unsurprising that the filmmakers working with director Sam Mendes were much taken with the breathtaking local sights and so decided to relocate a large portion of the plot for the most recent Bond film to Tyrol. And they're probably blissfully aware of the huge sensation this caused in the Ötztal valley. Although the film starring English actor Daniel Craig (51) in the role of the daredevil intelligence officer was released in cinemas already back in 2015, the ski resort still has agent fever to this day.



The peak of Gaislachkogel Mountain in Sölden



Bond, James Bond. Or English actor Daniel Craig as Agent 007

SÖLDEN – ON HER MAJESTY’S SECRET SERVICE

A few quick facts and figures reveal just how elaborate the film shoot for the 24th Bond adventure was, seeing as the action scenes were shot in the original locations and not in a green box. The weather conditions during the high alpine winter and the thin mountain air proved particularly challenging for the crew of 500. Pistes and roads had to be closed for the spectacular high-speed car chase on the glacier road. Forty-five off-road vehicles, two small British aircraft, and a helicopter were involved in filming the spectacle. The outcome is one of the most remarkable action scenes in the history of Bond.

Sölden’s mountain lift companies were also involved to guarantee a trouble-free shoot. While 31 lifts ensure effective ski operations on the ski runs in winter, it was mainly the ultra-modern Gaislachkogel mountain gondola that was used for film support. Tons of camera equipment, scenery, props, actors, and film crew had to be transported to *Ice Q*, the main film set for *Spectre*. Both the interior and exterior of the gourmet restaurant resembling an ice cube were used for scenes and converted into a futuristic private clinic for the film. Naturally, here Bond had to do without his shaken-not-stirred vodka martini in favour of an enzyme shake. But the scenery certainly makes up for this, with breathtaking panoramas of the surrounding mountainscape in every direction.

Of course, only a portion of these views can be enjoyed from the 007 Elements interactive world that opened close to *Ice Q*

in summer 2018. Architect Johann Obermoser has integrated the Bond museum into the subterranean permafrost at the Gaislachkogel’s summit, making it unique worldwide at this altitude. He has thus created the perfect backdrop for the museum’s cinematic scenes and interactive installations. At the same time, he showcases countless exhibits from Bond films both old and new and reveals many a secret from the decades of Bond history. These include technical gadgets from quartermaster Q’s workshop, along with famous props such as the golden gun from 1974. The action-packed exhibition extends over two floors and covers a total of 1300 square metres. It focuses entirely on the filmmaking process and could itself serve as a film set. One optical highlight and an essential photo motif is the elaborately recreated plane crash – the conclusion to Bond’s hair-raising chase through Sölden.

The blockbuster that raked in over 870 million US dollars worldwide has also proven a major asset to Sölden, a ski resort already well known throughout Europe. All around the world, the small town (population 3200) was suddenly the place on everyone’s lips. Yet it’s certainly no coincidence that Sölden was chosen as the latest destination for Ian Fleming’s spy. The high altitude means the snow is considered particularly reliable; it also fits perfectly into the series of exclusive alpine Bond locations used in the past. In 2015, 007 dared out into the snow for what was the sixth time after previously performing bold stunts in Cortina d’Ampezzo, Chamonix, and sophisticated St. Moritz. Given its reputation and unique flair, Sölden is the ideal complement.

In addition to the Alpine Ski World Cup Opening held every year in Sölden in October, the younger generation are also familiar with the town at the end of the Ötztal for another reason: numerous clubs and bars have been attracting the party crowd for decades, and the après-ski parties at the foot of the pistes are legendary. The undisputed highlight of the party calendar is the Electric Mountain Festival in early April. It has been attracting the hottest DJs and thousands of electronic music fans to the Ötztal for eight years now.

SKIING AND GASTRONOMIC INDULGENCE

Sölden also stands for upscale indulgence and high-class happenings, a reputation upheld by the luxurious *Hotel Central* with its annual ‘Wine on the Mountain’ event, which will next take place in April 2020. International and local

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winegrowers as well as top chefs meet guests at the five-star hotel and in Sölden's mountain huts, offering gourmet experiences at literally the highest level. The event organisers have developed a comprehensive package for skiers that is truly exceptional. Guests explore the local slopes in the accompaniment of prominent ski guides, who include past world champions and world-cup winners. Beginners receive expert tuition and competent skiers benefit from the pros' tips. There are stop-offs for wine tastings at an altitude of over 3000 metres, and exclusive gourmet lunches at *Ice Q* and at the foot of the Rettenbach glacier ensure ever-new unique gastronomic insights.

Speaking of glaciers, Sölden's mountainscape boasts a total of two, and both glaciers make the hearts of ski enthusiasts skip a beat right into the summer months. Due to the ski area's exposed location at an altitude of up to 3340 metres, snow is guaranteed. There are 33 kilometres of glacier runs for visitors to enjoy right through until September – warm temperatures and sunny weather included. Austria's longest ski run, the Schwarze Schneid, also awaits. A full 15 kilometres in length, it passes across the Rettenbach glacier down into Sölden valley, with an altitude difference of almost 2000 metres.

The conviction also prevails here that standstill means regression. Hence Sölden's mountain lifts invest in the ski area's infrastructure every single year. With a transport capacity of around 65,500 people per hour, they guarantee fast and convenient transport up the mountain without long wait times. And the countless excellently groomed runs mean there's plenty of space for everyone. After all, Sölden is the only ski resort in Austria with a total of three 3000-metre peaks in its ski area: the Gaislachkogel (3058 m), Tiefenbachkogel (3250 m), and Schwarze Schneid (3340 m) are known here simply as the Big 3 and offer utterly memorable ski experiences.

BIG 3 RALLY – SKIING WITH A VIEW

The Big 3 Rally offers the opportunity to ski all three 3000-metre peaks including their viewpoints in a single day. The 50-kilometre round trip is by all means ambitious but



Obergurgl, the highest parish in Austria, located in Sölden

certainly possible for experienced skiers in four to five hours. From the Giggijoch valley station, take the cable car up to the Rettenbach glacier and the first Big 3 experience on the Schwarze Schneid. From there, it's on to the Tiefenbach glacier and the second Big 3 viewpoint, the Tiefenbachkogel. This is followed by a 2000-metre downhill run over the Rettenbach glacier and through the Rettenbach valley to the Gaislachkogel gondola valley station. Then head up to the summit of the third peak in the Big 3 trio, Gaislachkogel, before gathering your remaining strength to make your way back down into the valley.

In addition to its variety of pistes, Sölden is also an absolute eldorado for freeriders due to the varied mountain scenery. And although this is of course now common knowledge, the vast array of over 70 kilometres of off-piste runs ensure that you'll find enough fresh powder to lay your own fresh tracks. Our tip for beginners: begin your freeriding adventure at the Hainbachjoch in Sölden or the Giggijoch, where wide ski runs allow sweeping curves in absolutely magical powder. After warming up there, you can head for the steeper terrain below the Gaislachkogel gondola. Naturally, though, only in the accompaniment of an experienced local freeriding guide. After all, other dangers lurk in the deep snow than on the prepared and protected runs.

While there are sporting challenges aplenty, Sölden can also be enjoyed at a leisurely pace and is family-friendly, too. Almost half of all routes (70 kilometres) are in fact blue routes, meaning they're classified as easy. Too flat for someone like James Bond, but just perfect for beginners and families with children. That being said, advanced and ambitious riders can pick up the speed on 45 kilometres of red runs or go all out on the 29 kilometres of black runs. And thrill seekers can follow in 007's tracks and give the obstacles in the Area 47 snow park a go. Located on the Giggijoch, a major hotspot in the Sölden ski area, it's a popular place for freestylers to meet. The balanced blend of beginner, medium, and pro elements along with kickers, rails, wall rides, and other features make this snow park one of the best in the Alps.



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Hotel Das Central

Photo by Roger W. Hildal

CROSS-BORDER INDULGENCE

Of course, the welcome trend among ski chalets and restaurants in the valley of focusing on culinary experiences has also reached Sölden. From haute cuisine to Tyrolean delicacies such as cheese, bacon, and *Kaiserschmarrn* shredded pancakes, you'll find everything you could possibly wish for here. Thus the options range from the *Tiroler Stube* with its rustic flair to the ultra-modern *Ice Q* gourmet restaurant on Gaislachkogel.

It's perhaps unsurprising that yet another culinary highlight awaits here in addition to the Bond museum and *Gault & Millau* award-winning cuisine. There's also a fine tippie with a very special background. Three countries, three top winegrowers, three wines – these are the ingredients for Pino 3000, which is aged in barrique oak barrels at exactly this altitude. Three winegrowers from among the best in their respective home countries have joined forces: the Austrian winery Paul Achs, the Italian winery St. Pauls, and the German winery Dr. Heger. Because all three countries can be seen from *Ice Q*. Every year, each

winery brings two small barriques of their best Pinot Noir here to age in a cellar built specifically for this purpose. Under consistently cool conditions, they mature into a powerful yet elegant composition. And this is also exactly where you must come to enjoy this special wine. For Pino 3000 cannot be purchased elsewhere; instead, it is only served at *Ice Q* and *Hotel Central* down in the valley.

Combine all of these elements and you'll quickly realise that a holiday like something out of a film can be experienced in Sölden. It's a stay that is infinitely more relaxed than James Bond's nerve-racking visit to the area, but one that will never get boring. The mix of action and relaxation is just right here in the Ötztal, and the range of off-piste possibilities is also impressive. Thus, the winter season includes parties and events for the younger crowd and culinary gatherings such as Wine on the Mountain for the more mature. Indeed, even 007 would probably exchange his beloved vodka martini for one or another of the fine wines presented here every year. **bo**

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