

Chill-out spaces

Ana Ow takes the heat out of summer with the world's top locations for ice-cool events





Is the region's almost year-round summer getting you all hot and bothered? From seasonal destinations to venues that are chilly all year round, plus a few surprises, *Mix* takes a look at some special snowcapped spaces where you can hold a really cool meeting or incentive, literally.

1. Sochi, Russia

WANT THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS? Head to Sochi, Russia's so-called "summer capital", with seaside spectacle and mountainous coastline vying for your "oohs" and "ahhs". Sochi won the bid for the 2014 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, so it will be a hot destination next year. It's also one of the few places on Earth that allows you to hit the ski slopes in the morning and sunbathe on the beach in the afternoon – yes, all in the same day.

The winters here are mild, with temperatures reaching a low of 11°C during the day and 4°C at night, so this is perfect for those who want a taste of snow without icicles forming on their eyelashes.

WHERE TO STAY AND WHY? The Swissotel Sochi in the alpine resort area of Krasnaya Polyana is brand new and right on the site for the 2014 Winter Olympics, providing 59 ski lifts to 200 odd kilometres of ski pistes. Located at an elevation of 960 metres in the Caucasus Mountains, the property is smack in the centre of the upper village square, near the shopping street and in between two ski villages, so guests will be in the thick of all the action.

WHAT TO DO? All manner of winter sports. If you're done skiing and snowboarding try ice-skating, sledding, snowmobiling or even curling for laughs. Get into the Olympic spirit already!

Then after all the hard work on the slopes or the shopping street, head on over to Purovel Spa and Sport at the hotel for a well-deserved pummelling to the joints. All in the name of healthy living, of course.

WINTER WONDERLAND SCORE? Dr Zhivago and Anna Karenina high.

WHAT TO WEAR? Furs and diamonds for the ladies, with a bikini under that coat. Winter Olympic memorabilia for men.

WHO SHOULD GO? Winter Olympics fans and first-timers to snow who are looking for a unique winter getaway.

CONTACT: swissotel.com/hotels/sochi-krasnaya-polyana

2. Salt Lake City, Utah, USA

There's more to SLC than Mormons and multilevel marketing companies. In fact, the annual Sundance Film Festival jacks up the city's glam quotient to stratospheric heights. Also well known is the ski lifestyle offerings during Utah's winter months, attracting well-heeled city dwellers in the market for a chill-out vacation.

WHERE TO STAY AND WHY? Owned by big-screen legend Robert Redford, Sundance Resort is a postcard-perfect setting for a winter meeting, presenting rustic mountain lodges equipped with wood-burning fireplaces, a location at the base of Mount Timpanogos and winter ski lodge décor throughout.

THEMES

Executive retreats, seminars and small business meetings can be arranged in a variety of spaces, from the 390 sqm) Rehearsal Hall to a secluded 84 sqm cedar cabin. The Rehearsal Hall is a chic-meets-rustic venue, boasting five-metre ceilings and sliding barn-style glass doors. The facility presents delegates with inspiring views of the nearby mountain and the famed Allan Hauser bronze *Morning Prayer* sculpture, and overlooks the Sundance pond which is covered with lights and snow in wintertime.

WHAT TO DO? Hit the slopes of course! On breaks or as a team-building activity, guests can also go snowshoeing, try their hand at fly-fishing, or enjoy rides on a horse-drawn carriage. When it's time for après-ski, guests can lounge around the fireplace with hot chocolate and good conversation.

WINTER WONDERLAND SCORE? High, in a stylish, tweet-worthy way.

WHAT TO WEAR? Ugg boots, cult brand winter wear and diffusion lines like Timberland's Abington shoes.

WHO SHOULD GO? Creative, hipster types would appreciate this laid-back getaway with its celeb-status pedigree.

CONTACT: phgmeetings.com/property/sundance-resort

3. Deqin, Yunnan, China

Located in southern China, Yunnan province borders the Indochinese countries of Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar as well as Tibet, long renowned for its connection to Buddhism and spirituality.

A team incentive or convention held here is a smart way of taking advantage of a grand location without venturing too far away. The town of Deqin in the Hengduan mountains is largely Tibetan and though rather isolated, this makes it a rather special alternative to the nearby tourist-trodden area of Lijiang.

WHERE TO STAY AND WHY? The Regalia Deqin Resort & Spa is a venue that is totally surrounded by the Meili Snow Mountains, so it's pretty hard to beat when it comes to having winter escapades.

Set in an alpine forest at an altitude of 3,400 metres and surrounded by 13 snowcapped peaks, the resort features refreshingly vibrant guestrooms and villas that combine Thai-style luxury with influences from Yunnan's minority cultures. Polished hardwood floors with under-floor heating, carved wood screens and Tibetan rugs provide warmth and add an exotic designer touch to the interiors. All rooms feature large picture windows that frame the breathtaking mountain or garden views.

Ideally equipped for corporate meetings and special events, the property features an elegant multifunctional banquet room with state-of-the-art lighting and audio equipment. A professional events team will also be at your beck and call to create the best winter-themed company function ever.

WHAT TO DO? Regalia's award-winning Andaman Spa will have you relaxed and rejuvenated in no time with its extensive selection of holistic therapies using Biodroga products from Germany and organic Thai essential oils.

For evening relaxation and socialising, Valley Bar is a cosy lounge serving fine wines, cocktails and cigars accompanied by live entertainment. Otherwise, revel in heritage trail walks through steep valleys, meditation in remote monasteries and artistic pursuits during the day (Chinese calligraphy anyone?).

WINTER WONDERLAND SCORE? Relatively high, although hot chocolate and marshmallows may not quite fit into the overall picture.

WHAT TO WEAR? Ladies, don your silk qipaos and gentlemen, get



3

outfitted for a Mandarin collar shirt for formal indoor dinners.

WHO SHOULD GO? Those with a penchant for Chinese culture would find great meaning in this Sino hideaway.

CONTACT: regalia.com.cn/en/index.php

4. Gstaad in Bern, Switzerland

If the term "winter wonderland" had its own entry in the dictionary, an image of the Swiss Alps might just be next to it. The city of Gstaad adds something special to it all. Travel there via rail past Lake Geneva on a train with a Panoramic carriage, offering plenty of glass windows from which to soak up the storybook views. Gstaad is well known for high culture and fine classical music – there are three famous annual music festivals here, one of which was started in the 1950s by renowned American violinist and conductor Yehudi Menuhin. So go ahead and be hoity-toity – we won't blame you for it.

WHERE TO STAY AND WHY? The first luxury hotel to be built in Gstaad



4

in 100 years, the 56-room Alpina Gstaad is a gem of a winter meeting retreat, with each room and meeting space presenting stunning views of the Alps. The property is designed in the style of a luxurious ski chalet and presents unlimited access to some of the world's finest outdoor winter activities. Three elegant meeting rooms and an auditorium host meetings and incentives gatherings.

PLANNING A WINTER GALA? The Salle Sarine ballroom transports guests into a setting of winter elegance, complete with rustic timber ceilings, wrought-iron chandeliers, and views of the snow-covered mountains outside. A cool bonus is the hotel's team of master craftsmen, who can decorate the space with ice sculptures to bring the wintry vibe indoors.

WHAT TO DO? Skiing's the thing. Snowboarding might be the cooler sport but in a place like this, you want to stick to old-school cool. Apart from snow activities, guests can also indulge in a variety of on-property amenities such as treatments at the Six Senses Spa – complete with a yoga studio and hammam – followed by quiet wine dinners at Megu steakhouse. Take a load off in the cigar room and round off the evening in the hotel's mini-theatre, which plays 2D and 3D movies – it also serves unlimited snacks.

WINTER WONDERLAND SCORE? Very high. Like we said, it's the Alps, baby.

WHAT TO WEAR? Serious ski gear by Rossignol and chic après-ski outfits for lounging around.

WHO SHOULD GO? Those who want a crisp, cool getaway and efficient Swiss service you can set your watch by.

CONTACT: phgmeetings.com/property/the-alpina-gstaad



5. Disneyland, Hong Kong

There are several big advantages to holding a meeting or incentive trip on Hong Kong's Lantau Island. Firstly, it's extremely close to the airport, so participants won't have to suffer a long transfer before starting the festivities. Secondly, there are a fair few sights to take in on the island proper – the Ngong Ping cable car and Citygate outlet stores for those who like to shop. Really, though, if you're coming here it's all about the "happiest place on Earth": Disneyland.

WHERE TO STAY AND WHY? With its sparkling lights, sprinkling of snowflakes and all-round festive cheer, Christmas is a truly magical time for business events at Hong Kong's Disneyland Resort, which offers two hotels: the Hong Kong Disneyland Hotel and the Disney Hollywood Hotel. This way, participants can have on-the-spot fun and games during their once-in-a-lifetime Disney retreat. Why Disneyland? Because it's not just a small world, it's a world that can and will custom-decorate itself in snow, sleighs and a giant Christmas tree, all for your team's amusement. All you have to do is ask.

This Christmassy ambience also extends to the hotels, with seasonal décor that begins in the hotel foyer and extends to a festive room overlay for the Kingdom Club Suites. Special Christmas-themed menus are available at the resort's two hotels and at the park's restaurants for cosy festive meals. Bragging rights include the exclusive use of the park's many attractions – including its newly opened Mystic Point – after closing hours.

WHAT TO DO? Are you kidding? The Magical Kingdom is yours for the taking with a buy-out package! Be a child again and conquer Space Mountain or the Spinning Teacups, whichever catches your fancy. Pose for photos with timeless characters like Mickey and Minnie Mouse or some of the newbies from Monsters University!

WINTER WONDERLAND SCORE? This experience scores low on the authenticity factor because, well, the snow is manmade. It does rate very high on the amusement scale.

WHAT TO WEAR? To get into the real spirit, wear Mickey and Minnie ears with your warmies. It won't get to sub-zero temperatures, so leave the earmuffs at home.

WHO SHOULD GO? The young at heart and any hardcore Disney fan – and let's face it, aren't we all? – will find this experience hard to resist.

CONTACT: disneymeetings.com/hongkong ■



5