



It's party time in the Aosta Valley

The start of the year saw skiers and snowboarders join locals in the Aosta Valley to celebrate the region's array of fair days and carnivals.

At the end of January artists and artisans descended on the town of Aosta for the annual Fair of Sant'Orso celebrations when the streets were filled with music and revelry. Some lucky visitors were allowed access into the secret private cellars, or 'crotte', which open their doors to offer people a glass of wine and some typical local dishes.

Other popular local carnivals include the Carnival of Verrés; the Pont-Saint-Martin Carnival; and the Coumba Freida Carnival. The latter owes its name to it taking place in the chilly confines of the Gran San Bernardo Valley and is closely linked to the historic passage of Napoleon through the valley's pass in 1800, during his army's Italian campaign – a point reflected in the costumes of the revellers who are welcomed by families who give them food and wine as they parade along the streets.

Upcoming gastronomic events include the Mountain Gourmet Ski Experience being held in Courmayeur, (12 – 15 March). This year's proceedings will bring together a number of big name British chefs, along with other international guests, to discover – and experiment with – the local produce. The fruits of their labours will form the backbone of a programme of tasty events including dinners and cooking demonstrations.



FOODIE FUN: A Mountain Gourmet Ski Experience involving British chefs is being held in Courmayeur from 12 – 15 March.

Various sporting events showcase the region's scenic landscapes and enviable slopes. The MarciaGranParadiso, has just taken place and featured events such as the 45km Classic and the 25km Skating. A special event, the Minimarzia, was reserved for children.

A Women's Alpine Skiing World Cup was also scheduled to take place in La Thuile (29 February – 1 March) and for cross-country skiing enthusiasts there is the Masters World



LIFE ENHANCING: Skiers and snowboarders can get instruction in Courmayeur regardless of a physical, cognitive, sensory, mental, life-limiting or other health-related condition.

Championship 2020 taking place in Sant'Orso in Cogne from 5 – 14 March) which attracts almost a thousand athletes.

The Aosta Valley boasts spectacular scenery, world-class skiing and snowboarding, food of the highest quality and a history stretching back to Roman times. At the heart of the alps and bordered by France and Switzerland, Aosta valley is surrounded by some of the highest peaks in Europe: Cervino, Monte Rosa, Gran Paradiso and the king of them all, Mont Blanc.

With Turin, Milan and Geneva airports all within easy reach, the Aosta Valley resorts are among the easiest to get to from the UK making it an ideal destination for a weekend or short break.

For more information go to: www.aosta-valley.co.uk

COURMAYEUR: The recently formed Mountains 4 All group, which advocates inclusive, accessible mountain tourism, has teamed up with Courmayeur to offer adaptive skiing with trained, specialist ski instructors at the Courmayeur Ski & Snowboard School and the Mont Blanc Ski School.

Mountains 4 All believe that regardless of a physical, cognitive, sensory, mental, life-limiting or other health-related condition, visitors can enjoy the same life-enhancing mountain experiences as any other skier or non-skier visitor and work to make that happen using equipment such as mono and bi-ski wheelchairs, 'trotty skis' and special audio tools for people with visual impairments.

Andrea Borney, snowboard instructor at Courmayeur and Technical Director for 'Antenne Handicap ONLUS' has also been breaking down barriers for those with disabilities who wish to snowboard. Andrea created 'BASS' (Borney Adapted Snowboard System) – an apparatus that allows the snowboarder to be attached to their instructor.

More info at: ski2freedom.com

TRENTINO: Pejo 3000, in the Dolomites mountains, is claiming to be the home of the world's first ever plastic-free ski resort. The area in Val di Sole is home to 12 miles of ski runs and seven ski lifts. Skiers and snowboarders visiting Pejo 3000 this season will no longer find plastic bottles, cutlery or straws in any of the mountain huts, whilst single-use sachets of ketchup and mayonnaise will also be completely removed.

Informative visual boards are being installed within the ski area to educate visitors on the Pejo Plastic-Free project, to prevent skiers bringing any plastics in and to ensure all rubbish is brought back down with them. This is all part of the Pejo area's quest to become the 'Green Valley' of the Dolomites.

VAL GARDENA: The Italian resort of Val Gardena, in the heart of the Dolomites, saw a ski contest with a difference across the slopes of Sud Tirol in January – the inaugural Ski Caching event, a challenging all-day orienteering/treasure hunt that is to become an annual fixture.

Sixteen teams took part in the 2020 event, which started in the main square of Ortisei and involved contestants racing to track down as many of the 50 checkpoints as they could – some of them in difficult to reach and obscure locations – and getting extra points by taking the most off-the-wall pictures at the markers.

The Skier & Snowboarder magazine's own Rob Freeman won an award in the veterans' section of the race. Tourist official Christina Demetz said: "The contest was quite challenging in testing conditions on the mountain, but the teams all did well and obviously enjoyed themselves too. We're looking forward to next year's event."

PLASTIC BAN: Pejo 3000 claims to be the world's first ever plastic-free ski resort.



CAUGHT ON CAMERA: British team members Amanda Barks and Monica Adorno bend over backwards to boost their score during the Ski Caching event in Val Gardena.