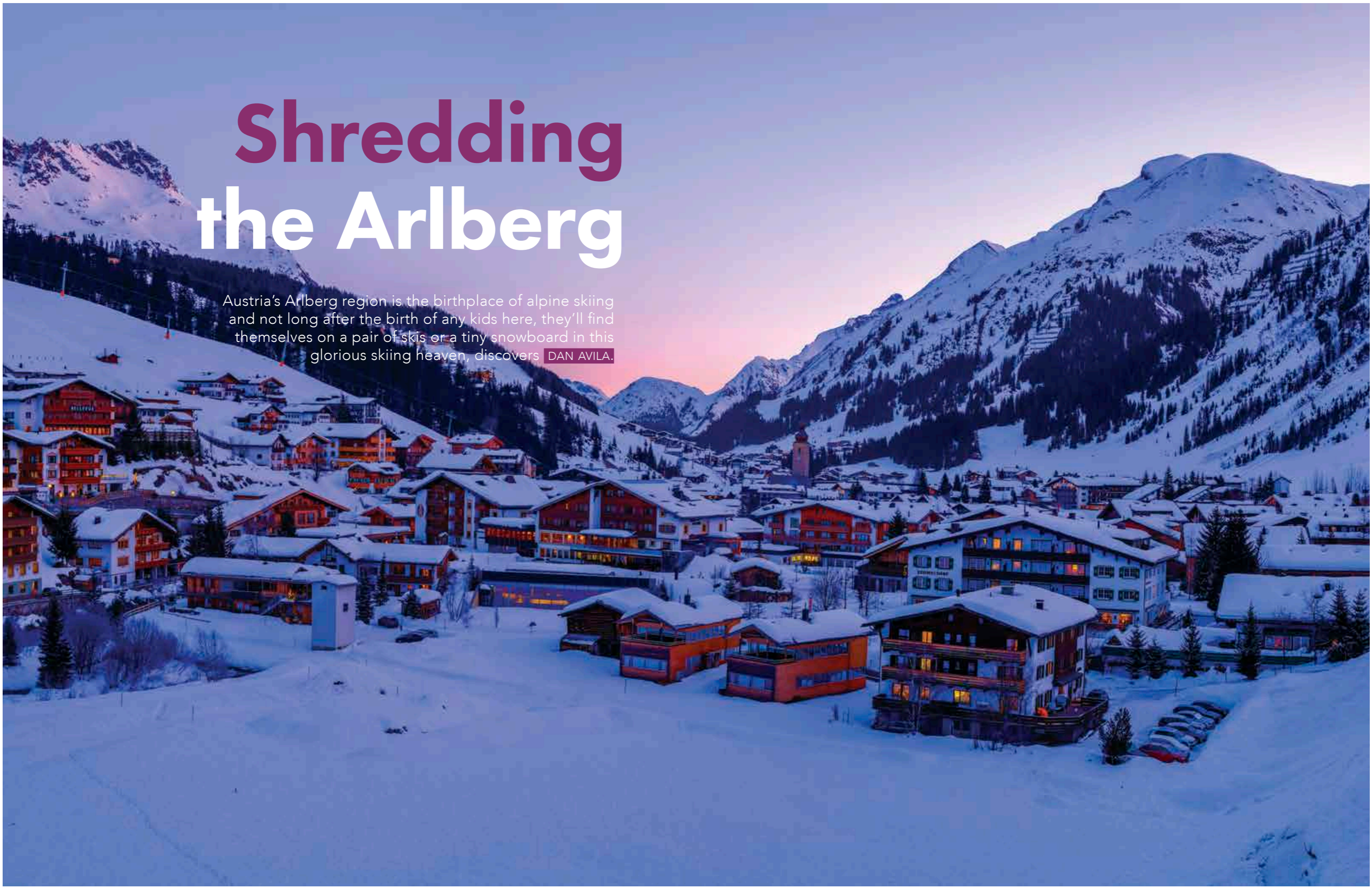


Shredding the Arlberg

Austria's Arlberg region is the birthplace of alpine skiing and not long after the birth of any kids here, they'll find themselves on a pair of skis or a tiny snowboard in this glorious skiing heaven, discovers **DAN AVILA.**



Skiing in this picture-perfect part of the **Austrian Alps** is as natural as walking. In fact, it is a necessary part of the daily commute in many cases. Kids here learn competitive skiing and snowboard racing, with the **Arlberg** producing a disproportionately high number of world champions.

The **Arlberg** is made up of five picture-perfect towns that share a heritage for alpine snow sports, each with their own distinct flavour and personality. Families staying in the region can now visit them all easily thanks to the network of interconnecting runs and lifts.

The largest and most cosmopolitan is **St Anton**, famous for its powder runs, parties and legendary après-ski. If a night or two without the kids is on the cards, ski into the bars that are elevated above the village to experience the party that ends with a very careful, schnapps-powered night ski back to town.

The town of **St Christoph** is one of the highest resorts in the Alps with a maximum of only 700 guests and has been a place of hospitality for alpine travellers since the 14th century.

Stuben caters particularly well to families and has direct access to 88 lifts and 300 kilometres of runs that interconnect the towns. Beautiful **Zürs** has Austria's heli-skiing covered, but the restrained elegance of the pretty-as-a-picture town of **Lech** is my favourite, with more advanced skiing options, a chocolate-box setting and a perfect size that is small enough to be quaint and walkable, yet with all the facilities and options to suit any family.

It's not just the towns that have their own ambiances; the slopes that surround them are also imbued with unique personalities. With so many kilometres of groomed runs, a week spent in the **Arlberg** will still have you just scratching the surface. The size and scale of the region, combined with variable conditions that change daily, mean that hiring a local guide is highly recommended. Our guide, Marcus Jenny – part of the former elite military Ski Hunter unit before becoming a professional ski guide – ensured that the skiing experience matched our competence and ambition levels. This made for the perfect combination of fun, exhilaration and challenge, always perfectly timed around lunch breaks at internationally acclaimed restaurants with jaw-dropping views.

Powder puffs

If some of the family are feeling more adventurous, moving off the perfectly groomed pistes will amp things up to a whole new level. I've been fortunate enough to ski backcountry many times on different continents, but making first tracks in metre-deep champagne-powder through the pines of the **Arlberg** is unlike anything I have ever experienced. If powder-skiing is the order of the day, it's off with the hard-cutting skinny skis and on with the wide paddles to assist in floating over and through the soft, cloud-like powder ... that is, until the inevitable gentle tumble and the challenging remount in what feels like a whipped meringue. Just to make the family feel like next-level pros, off-piste skiing comes with the obligatory avalanche kit and beacon. It's safety first, at least until the après starts.

Skiing the **Arlberg** is just as much about the world-famous après as it is the glorious slopes. Rug up and explore the town in the early evening and, if there is a little snow falling, the setting is truly magical.

Lech is particularly beautiful at night, with its historic architecture straddling the icy waterway that bisects the town.

To explore a little further afield, all members of the family can enjoy a snowshoeing experience through the forest with occasional wildlife sightings, storybook landscapes and cascading rivers all surrounded by towering mountains that call you back to those endless, spectacular groomed runs.

Chalets and strudel

Accommodation in the **Arlberg** towns is widely varied, covering all tastes and budgets from the ultra-modern to strictly traditional. My most memorable stay was at the quirky and beautifully eclectic **Kristiania Lech**, operated by Gertrud Schneider, whose family is as much a part of the **Arlberg** as snow and strudel.

No exploration of the **Arlberg** is complete without a journey through the traditional culinary delights of the region.

Strudel never tasted so good and the cheese, wine and the wiener schnitzel will bring a tear to the eye, all served with the special love and care that defines Austrian hospitality, something that has been a speciality of the **Arlberg** for centuries. ●

Arlberg Resort Report

Ski skiarlberg.at/en

Info austria.info/skiing

Getting there Fly into Zurich and make the two-hour drive to the **Arlberg**.

Stay & eat kristiania.at
schwarzeradler.com/en alkira.at/en

Cool tips

The region has great value passes that get the family onto the world's best slopes for about half the price of those in Australia.

Looking for ski boots? Some of the world's best are made in the **Arlberg**, with a mould taken of your foot for a precise and comfortable fit.



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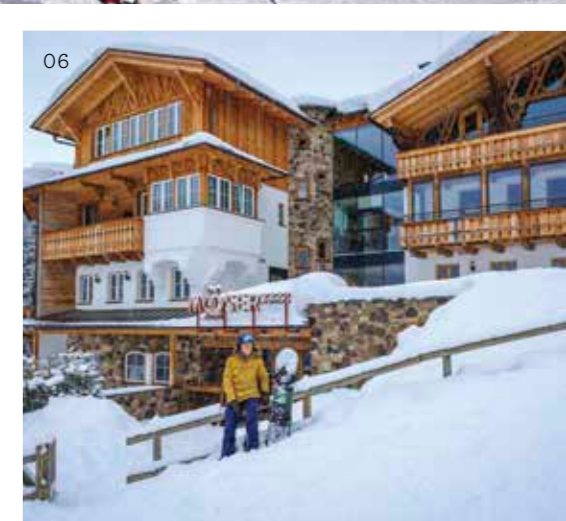
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01 Lech is particularly pretty by night 02 The **Arlberg** is ski heaven 03 View from the hotel © Kristiania Lech 04 Kids are on skis here shortly after birth © Lech-Zürs Tourismus 05 An icy waterway bisects the town of **Lech** 06 Ready to shred in **St Anton**. Images 01,02, 05 & 06 © Dan Avila