

USUALLY wait until the end of every ski season to round up my favourite experiences but although it's only mid-February, I already have my winner for 'party of the season'.

Last weekend, I was in the Swiss resort of Crans-Montana — a family-friendly location that's reinventing itself as a progressive and 'tres cool' destination — for the annual Knight Frank City Ski Championships. The championships, organised by Amin Momen's Momentum Ski, are a get-together for financiers who race hard in giant slalom and dual slalom categories then party hard, with plenty of networking and eating out in some of CM's 90 restaurants in between.

The event draws UK Olympians Graham Bell and Emily Sarsfield as well as former Formula 1 champion Damon Hill and BBC News journalist Frank Gardner, a panellist in the tournament's serious part, the FT forum.

As if the event isn't already full of fun, this year's included an electric new element — not just for the City Ski Championships but for the Alps in general. Revival, a new live music event, saw hundreds of people partying in CM's on-mountain Cry d'Er club, situated at over 2000m.

Revival — which creators plan on bringing to London, Ibiza and other ski resorts — is the brainchild of Revival Records. James Reynolds, one of the UK's most respected and successful music producers, explained that the concept is to take well-known and well-loved songs and record them at the iconic Abbey Road Studios with unknown but powerful vocalists.

THE live Revival event was the next logical stage of the concept and brought the house down at the City Ski Championships' awards ceremony on Saturday night. To finish the night off in style, DJ Mousse T — the German-Turkish producer famous for club classics Horny 98 and Sex Bomb — did a set before partied-out guests made their way back down the mountain via gondola.

To warm up before the main event, Revival performers had also appeared at apres-ski sessions at Zero Dix restaurant and at Cry d'Er.

Crans-Montana is set on a sunny south-facing plateau, which means it gets stunning sunrises and sunsets. The sheer joy and fun of dancing the afternoon away while looking out over the alps from Cry d'Er was priceless — not to mention the dance antics of some City Ski attendees.

The resort is known for its James Bond connections — Roger Moore's family still has a home there — glamorous past and high-end designer stores. It also has one of the most impressive snow parks in the Alps and is ahead of the curve with Alaia Lodge, an indoor and outdoor action sports centre loved by freestyle sport fans.

The resort is reached from Geneva via Sierre with the final part of the journey on



Party down on the slopes

The season's most epic event has already been decided



Live like there's snow tomorrow: Crans-Montana and, inset, dancing the night away

PEAK SEASON

CATHERINE MURPHY

TRAVEL EXTRA SKIING JOURNALIST OF THE YEAR 2022



the longest — and 100 per cent carbon neutral — funicular in the Alps. Surrounded by vines, the funi ride gives a hint of the land of forests, lakes, glaciers and vineyards that awaits guests in Crans-Montana.

Skiing is family-friendly with plenty of blue and red runs, more advanced terrain on the Plaine Morte glacier and dreamy views across to Mont Blanc and the Matterhorn.

I stayed at the newly-opened four-star hotel Fearn Valasia, which featured great apres-ski music performances. I also got a sneak preview of the new Six Senses property, which is due to open in March.

A truly stylish mountain bolthole, it features Japanese dining, a 24-hour gym and a coveted ski-in ski-out loca-

tion on the slopes just above Zero Dix.

Not wanting to leave the fun behind, I stayed an extra night at Hotel Splendide, a traditional hotel with affordable rates and brilliant views over the resort.

Crans-Montana is already well established as a year-round destination with the Omega European Masters golf event taking place in early September each year and its position as the first stop outside Italy on the Giro d'Italia.

Perhaps Momentum Ski needs to double the fun and bring a summer gourmet or hiking event to Crans-Montana, just so that we don't have to wait another year for the party of the season.

See Crans-Montana.ch, cityskichampionships.com and revivalrecords.org for details.



HOLIDAY like James Bond? Why yes — as long as I am not required to put myself in danger and/or kill anyone.

Unintentionally, in the last 12 months, my holiday destinations have followed in the footsteps of 007. First up was a winter weekend visit to the pretty village of Andermatt in Switzerland to explore the 'swisstainable' resort. Its Alpine location featured in 1964's Goldfinger and saw Sean Connery famously pursue Goldfinger along the legendary Furka Pass in his Aston Martin DB5.

Next was a summer trip to the picturesque Unesco World Heritage site and ancient Italian city of Matera, which was the backdrop to the opening scenes of the most recent Bond film, No Time to Die. These saw Daniel Craig involved in a high-speed car and motorbike chase around its winding streets.

But by far the best Bond 'holiday' experience came on a recent visit to Sölden, in Austria's Tyrolean Alps. These feature in 2015's Spectre and my mission was to enjoy the James Bond lifestyle alongside my 19-year-old daughter.

While I was channelling Bond in spirit, in reality I wasn't. Ever since my first ski trip some 25 years ago, I have diagnosed myself with mapophobia: an inability to read a map, in particular ski maps, which send me over the edge. In one recent case, my affliction led me to a completely different resort which resulted in me having to get a taxi back to the hotel.

Thankfully, getting to the small village of Sölden did not require any MI6 planning, given it is a straightforward one-hour drive from Innsbruck airport.

Our base for our four-night stay was the family-owned Das Central hotel which, as its name implies, is right in the middle of Sölden.

As soon as we entered the five-star, 125-room property, we instantly felt the luxurious Bond vibes, from the laid-back comfortable seating in the communal areas, roaring fires, a stylish curved bar area, perfect for a Vesper martini — shaken not stirred, of course — along with a well-stocked wine cellar, cigar room, gym, spa and a choice of restaurants.

We settled in to our two-bedroom, two-bathroom suite, which was stylish and extremely comfortable with views of the snowy mountains. We even had our own private sauna — 007 eat your heart out.

Right next to the hotel is Intersport Glanzer Rent (glanzer.at/en/intersport-rent), where we hired our skis, poles and helmets. We were looked after by the knowledgeable and efficient staff, picked up our kit in record time and took it back to our designated

heated ski locker in the basement of the hotel.

After a few missed years on the slopes due to Covid, together with my fear of the dreaded ski map, we decided to hire a guide to show us around the area and check our technique. The hotel recommended Ski Schule Sölden (skischule-soelden.com), the biggest and oldest ski school in the area. Eddie, an English-born ski guide, whisked us off to the nearby lift.

As we whizzed around the mountain, he told us all about Sölden and the Alpine Ski World Cup, which takes place every October, showed us where Spectre was filmed on the mountains, guided us down some great runs, suggested others to do during our stay, and patiently showed us where we were on the map after each run.

We topped off our first day with a delicious lunch at the new Falcon restaurant, which can be found at the middle of the Gaislachkogel gondola and then headed in to Sölden for a spot of apres-ski. It was the perfect first day back.

Day two and three we were skiing without Eddie but something of a miracle happened — I finally mastered the art of map reading. With a spring in my skis, I guided us around the mountains. Although we did go down a ski lift instead of up on one occasion...

On our final day, after four hours of non-stop skiing and feeling as invincible as Bond himself, we decided to pay a visit to 007 Elements (007elements.soelden.com), the world's first James Bond cinematic installation on the summit of the Gaislachkogel mountain, 3,048m high, reachable by cable car. Adult tickets cost from €22, children from €12.

The experience has been cinematically designed so it is as engaging as any Bond film and appeals to all ages, skiers and non-skiers alike. While it mainly focuses on Spectre, due to the location, other Bond films are also featured. We were led in to nine high-tech 'galleries', each dedicated to an aspect of filmmaking that define a James Bond film, and also gadgets and technology.

A number of the exhibits are interactive, with state-of-the-art technology and it was a brilliant way to spend some time learning the films. Our favourite part was seeing all the behind-the-scenes filming linked to Spectre and being in the actual location it was filmed in as well as the aircraft which features in the thrilling glacier chase.

To finish our Bond experience we visited Ice Q (iceq.at), a gourmet restaurant which is directly next to 007 Elements. The spectacular building was designed by Innsbruck-based architect Johann Obermoser and teeters over the Oztal Alps. With