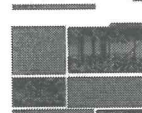


Four of the best Mountain retreats, by Francesca Syz

Das Central Sölden, Austria An hour's drive from Innsbruck airport, the village of Sölden in the Tyrolean Alps is the sole place in Austria within easy reach of three mountains over 3,000m, collectively offering some of the most beautiful ski trails in the region. It is home to the excellent, family-run Das Central hotel, the only five-star in town, opened by Hans Falkner in 1969 and still run by his daughter Angelika. While the hotel is relatively large, it has the personality of somewhere more intimate. For those who want it there are ski runs for all levels of experience, but if you wish merely to relax in a beautiful setting there is plenty to keep you occupied at the hotel, such as Vinoble treatments at the three-storey Venetian-themed spa. The hotel's restaurants include the gourmet Ötztaler Stube, decorated to feel like the dining room of a traditional Austrian home, and the glass-walled Ice Q (pictured) at the top of the Gaislachkogel glacier. Strong on little details, Das Central even whisks your shoes back to your room after you have had your boots fitted. **The details** Doubles from £290, half-board (00 43 5254 22600; central-soelden.at).

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Eremito Hotelito del Alma *Umbria, Italy* When the charismatic Italian fashion designer-turned-hotelier Marcello Murzilli discovered the foundations of the ruined 14th-century hilltop house in Umbria on which he would build his 14-room mountaintop retreat, no road led to it – he had hiked in. Today you can drive most of the way (it is about two hours from Florence) but a four-wheel-drive collects you a couple of miles away to complete the final leg, which involves, among other things, going through a river. This is a retreat in the truest sense, the purpose being to reconnect with yourself, so each bedroom has only one single bed. Built using stone from the original structure, the sustainable, candlelit hotel is modelled on an ancient Franciscan monastery, albeit one furnished with the most exquisite textiles gathered by Murzilli on his travels. A typical day includes a visit to the on-site chapel for spiritual readings, yoga and meditation, walks in the forest, delicious vegetarian meals at communal tables (including silent dinners each night), time in a grotto-like plunge pool and siestas. **The details** Bedrooms cost from £140, full-board (00800 3746 8357; designhotels.com).



Hotel Alpaga *Megève, France* While I'm a sucker for an old-school chalet-style hotel, my ideal alpine lodging is actually something confident enough to combine tradition and sense of place with a fresh, contemporary style. Just above Megève, with the most spectacular south-facing views of Mont Blanc, Alpaga does all that – and it couldn't feel more inviting on a cold winter's night. It has 27 bedrooms, plus five private chalets with three to six bedrooms each. La Colline Spa has a floodlit indoor pool with massage jets, two treatment cabins, a hammam and, outdoors, a Scandinavian hot tub and sauna. There are two great restaurants, both overseen by the dashing young Christophe Schuffenecker. La Table de l'Alpaga serves imaginative 'mountain cuisine' and was awarded a Michelin star in February. A more relaxed option is the bistro-style l'Onyx restaurant and bar. There is also a knowledgeable concierge for local restaurants and other off-piste recommendations. **The details** Doubles from about £262, B&B. The hotel is closed during May, June, October and November (00 33 4509 14870; alpaga.com).



Torre del Remei Girona, Spain Josep Maria Boix and his wife, Loles, know a thing or two about running a good restaurant with rooms – at their first, the Boix in Martinet, Josep's food won them the accolade of best hotel restaurant in Spain in 1982. So when they bought an art nouveau mansion in the Catalan Pyrenees on the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela in 1989, it was always going to be good. Launched as the 11-room Torre del Remei hotel in 1991, and set among shady sequoias within an eight-acre forest, it is part neo-classical, part modernist, part contemporary, but with a fleet of 21st-century frills. The restaurant's progressive European menu, personally prepared by Josep, who sources the vegetables from his organic kitchen garden and other produce seasonally and locally, is exceptional. Truffle fans will enjoy the dedicated truffle menu, available from January to March. The hotel sits in lovely gardens, has an outdoor pool and prides itself on the range of activities it offers, including cooking classes, horse riding and hot-air ballooning. **The details** Doubles from about £230 (00800 0825 1020; relaischateaux.com). *Next week hotels for winter weekends*

