



Alexandra Willis travelled to the picturesque Austrian resort of Brand, where multi-sports enthusiasts can combine tennis and skiing, and plenty more besides

Alpine heaven

Choosing a holiday these days is much like wandering around an Indian market – being assaulted from all sides by a multitude of options, telling you to look at this deal, or take advantage of that offer, while juggling the differing demands of the family.

How refreshing then to come across Pure Alpine Holidays, which specialises in tailor-made tennis and ski holidays in the mountains. Formerly known as Timeout Options, Pure Alpine is the brainchild of Kasia Chmielewska, who hit upon the concept of combining her two passions while

on holiday in Brand, a picturesque Austrian village her family have been visiting for nearly 50 years.

“One year, we had a very bad week of ski conditions, and like a typical 11-year-old, I was a bit bored. So my father found some tennis courts and booked me in. When the weather was good I skied; when it was bad, I played tennis.”

The first of Pure Alpine’s three resorts, Brand nestles among the Rätikon mountains in the Vorarlberg region of Austria, and its family-friendly atmosphere makes it the ideal place for a week away. The village has a wonderfully

relaxed air, with none of the hustle and bustle of so many big resorts, and the beautiful wooden hotels are a welcome reprieve from the concrete jungles so common in the French Alps.

The 900 inhabitants of Brand, which was founded a little over 650 years ago, are fiercely committed to their village’s local identity, and it stands out among holiday resorts for its hospitality and quality. The actress Keira Knightley was even spotted keeping a very low profile whilst learning to ski there last year. “We care about our guests because we care about Brand,” says Gernot Schweigkofler, Destination Manager for the Brandnertal ski area.

“The locals are shareholders in the Bergbahnen, the lift company, so everyone has an interest and wants guests to have a good time.”

According to Kasia, this level of hospitality is crucial to Pure Alpine. “We care most about the service we provide to our clients, and Brand is unique: they have outstanding service levels and know how to give people a really good experience, which is our priority.”

Pure Alpine has an excellent relationship with four of Brand’s superb hotels. I stayed at the Hotel Valavier, a delightful four-star hotel

run by Andrea and Edi Meyer, which boasts comfortable surroundings, a luxurious spa and rooftop pool, and sumptuous food. The latter was excellent for the hearty appetite I developed while I was there – an occupational hazard of the fresh mountain air.

The flexibility of Brand as a resort makes it ideally suited for a Pure Alpine holiday. Guests can ski all the way down to the village from any point in the ski area, and then walk to the tennis courts, opposite the Hotel Scesaplana, in just 10 minutes. “What’s perfect for us is that everything is so close,” says Kasia. “We want guests to be able to choose whether to ski or play tennis on a whim, with maximum ease.”

Indoor tennis facilities are not common in ski resorts, so Brand’s three indoor courts are all the more valuable. Pure Alpine organises coaching through the European Tennis Academy, which has developed ‘Mental Match Play’, a unique system of coaching through music, which takes players through a series of drills to music, designed to heighten concentration and minimise distraction.

“The Academy has been here for 25 years,” says Kasia, “and we use their standard of coaching as a

British pros Karen Cross and Lorna Woodroffe hosted a tennis week on a selection of Brand’s courts



PHOTO: ALEXANDRA WILLIS

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The view from the village looks out to the Scesaplana, the region's highest peak

The luxurious Hotel Valavier offers guests stunning cuisine and spa facilities



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benchmark for our other resorts.” Towards the end of the season, it is even possible to play tennis outdoors, on the Hotel Scesaplana’s two heated Astroturf courts, which melt any lingering snow and ice. In the summer, guests can choose from two additional outdoor clay courts, or the four clay courts at the scenic Brand Tennis Club.

Brand is not a resort for daredevil skiers, but its selection of blue and red runs offer plenty for those who are either beginners, or rediscovering their ski legs. There are 14 lifts providing access to 53km of runs, as well as a dedicated beginners area and two kindergartens in the village. The lift company, the Bergbahnen, is constantly looking to improve the ski area. Mathias Bösch, the Marketing and Sales Manager for the Bergbahnen, took me on a tour of Brand’s two new lifts, which opened last year. The Dorfbahn, referred to jokingly by the English as ‘St Pancras’, takes skiers up to the ski area in three minutes, and the Panoramabahn crosses the valley to the Büserberg area in just four minutes. Pure Alpine organises instruction through the two ski schools, the Surfing Academy and the Rätikon, and equipment can be

hired from one of four hire shops.

“What is most important to us is that you can pick and choose – if a guest decides skiing is not for them, there are so many other things they can do to enjoy their winter holiday,” says Kasia.

Although Pure Alpine’s main focus is on tailor-made winter holidays, which it also organises in the Swiss and Italian Alps, the company has developed a series of special packages to tempt prospective guests and treat existing clients. I joined in on one of these, a pro-hosted tennis week with former British No.2s Lorna Woodroffe and Karen Cross, and was immediately struck by the enthusiasm that their easy-going presence generated in the group. Cross and Woodroffe coached us for two hours each day, which left time to pursue the numerous activities on offer, such as hiking, volleyball, swimming, and even archery.

“A lot of people are looking for something that’s slightly different, which pushes us to keep developing and coming up with new ideas,” says Kasia.

“We are proud of the fact that we are not just another holiday company.” After my time in Brand, I couldn’t agree more.

BRAND ESSENTIALS

Alpine holiday planner

How to get there

Brand is a 90km drive from Friedrichshafen airport, 145km from Innsbruck airport, and 150km from Zurich airport. The nearest train station is Bludenz (11km away). Pure Alpine can organise transfers.

Ski facilities

Brand lies at 1,037m high, and has 14 lifts and 53km of runs. There are also 36km cross-country trails, and a 6km toboggan run. Lift passes for children under six are free. The runs are mainly reds and blues, with a couple of blacks in nearby Büserberg. The slopes are suitable for families and beginners. Lifts are open from 8.30am to 4pm. Lessons are arranged through the two local ski schools.

Tennis facilities

Three indoor courts (indoor clay), six outdoor clay, and two outdoor Astroturf (heated underneath). Coaching is arranged through the European Tennis Academy. There is a choice between three- and five-day courses for all levels, as well as private tuition.

Other activities

In winter, there is snowshoeing, tobogganing, ice skating, curling and Nordic walking, while in summer you can go horseriding, mountain biking and swimming, or climb, fish, hike or play golf. The majority of hotels have spa and sauna facilities.

If you fancy going further afield, Bludenz is just a short bus journey away. There you can visit the world-famous Suchard chocolate shop, and

the town’s medieval city centre. Nearby Feldkirch and Bregenz – locations of the new James Bond film – not to mention the principality of Liechtenstein, are also worth a visit.

Where to stay

Hotel Valavier (4 stars)

Family-run, traditional yet modern feel, warm and inviting. Centrally located opposite the new lift. Delicious food, locally sourced, with a modern twist.

Hotel Sonne (3 stars)

Balances rustic alpine style with modern comfort. Located in the heart of the village.

Hotel Scesaplana (4 stars)

Owned by the Schwärzler family. Large and comfortable. Great mountain views, atmospheric lounge with open fire and bar. Restaurant has a winter garden. The tennis courts, indoor and outdoor, are just opposite.

Biotel Apartments (3 stars)

Three-star self-catering eco apartments, an ideal base for the environmentally conscious traveller. Designed using natural materials, and tastefully furnished. All have fully equipped kitchens – dishwasher, microwave, oven, coffee machine and fridge.

How to book

Call 01273 778006 or email info@purealpineholidays.co.uk. You can hold options for up to 48 hours. Pure Alpine prides itself on accommodating any special needs or request, so don’t hesitate to ask. Visit www.purealpineholidays.co.uk for more information.

