

Why Andorra

Should Be Your Next Winter Destination

FHM visits one of Europe's smallest nations and discovers that size doesn't always matter.

Words **Janine Lee** Photography **Grandvalira Andorra & Janine Lee**



Nestled between France and Spain sits a nation that's only 468 sq km across (smaller than Singapore!), with a population of a mere 80,000. It's about a three-hour drive from either Barcelona or Toulouse and is only accessible by road.

Right off the bat, we'd like to give you three reasons to visit: 1) It's fun when people need to Google your recent holiday destination. 2) The beaches in Bali are overcrowded, the weather in London is dour, and the seafood in Japan is radioactive. 3) Bragging rights, of course. Still not sold? Well, here are a few more reasons why you should log on to CheapTickets.sg and start booking your flight.

BE ONE WITH THE MOUNTAINS

Working at FHM, there aren't many things that leave one speechless. But having lived our lives in the tropics and generally being used to sandy beaches and too much sun,

it was hard not to be in awe when we got our first real good look at the Pyrenees Mountains, where the Grandvalira Snow Territory is located. Perfectly formed and peaked with snowy caps, those picturesque mountains made us feel as if we'd casually wandered into a postcard. In our opinion, this is where you should spend the bulk of your time in Andorra — the way we see it, why travel over 10,000km if you're not going to fully enjoy the change in scenery? From trekking a mountain in snowshoes, to spending the night in an igloo hotel, there's so much to do here, you'll never want to leave.

Pro tip: If you're after a truly different experience, arrange to spend a night at the Grandvalira Igloo Hotel, which includes a bar-restaurant, terrace and Jacuzzi. Built entirely from snow and fully furnished, each room accommodates up to six. Just don't attempt to start any fires and you should be golden. *Prices for a standard room at the Igloo Hotel start from €109 per person.*



ANDORRA

TRAIN FOR THE 2018 WINTER OLYMPICS

Split into six different sectors that each have their own set of slopes and unique snow activities, **Grandvalira** is one of the largest ski resorts in Europe with 210km of ski runs spread over 118 slopes. In case you're unsure what those numbers equate to, it roughly means you could ski for a month without taking the same run twice, and also lessens the likelihood of crashing into another tourist on the slopes. To sweeten the deal, the place has amazing powder and we didn't have to spend an eternity queuing for the chairlifts. There's also a ski school with instructors and equipment rental. If you're still unconvinced about the quality of skiing or snowboarding you'll be getting there, Grandvalira regularly plays host to winter-sport competitions and world championships. If it's good enough for the pros, it's good enough for us.

Prices at Grandvalira range from €20 for half a day on the slopes, to €280 for seven ski days.

Pro tip: After spending the morning skiing, instead of wasting valuable time going back to your hotel for a meal, break for lunch on the slopes at AndBurger. It serves delicious steaks and offers a great view of the mountains.

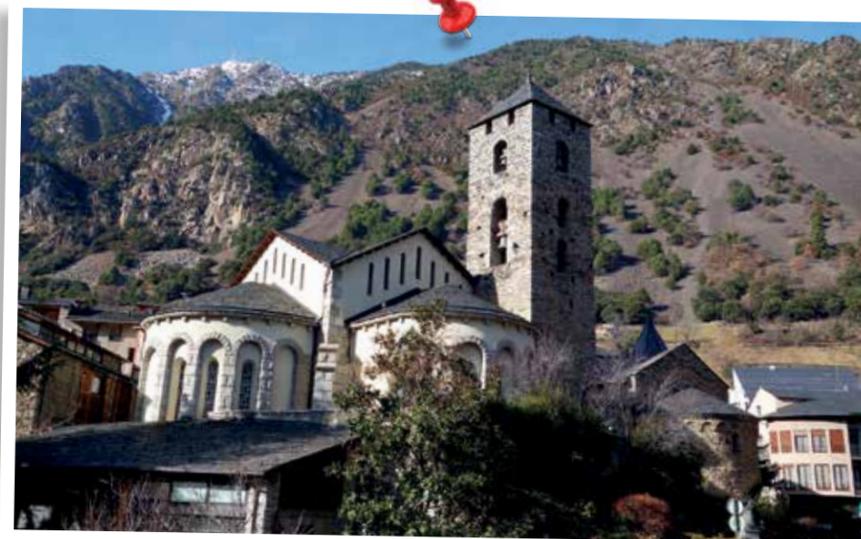


COMMAND AN ARMY OF HUSKIES

As huge fans of both dogs and snow, the experience of "mushing" with these friendly huskies was like having all our birthdays come at once. The rush of speed set against that mountain backdrop, combined with the knowledge that an experience like this probably only comes once in a lifetime, left *FHM* hyperventilating, overly-excited and completely ecstatic. Also, if you've ever wondered what it feels like to be the commander of a canine legion, we can confirm that it is awesome.

Mushing is available at the Grau Roig and El Tarter sectors. Prices from €40 per person.

Pro tip: Make sure your camera has a hand strap because it's a bumpy ride, but it's definitely Instagram-worthy.



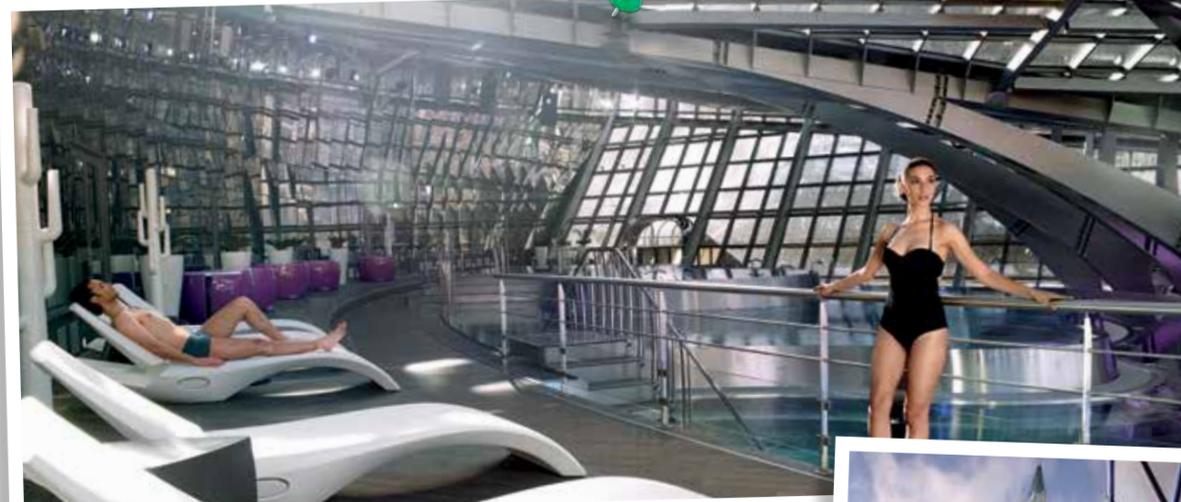
UTILISE THE LOW TAX RATES

When you're done conquering the mountains (or can no longer move because all your muscles have gone on strike), hit the city and indulge in retail therapy. While the shopping here might not be as exciting as London or Paris, there are a few items that shouldn't be passed up – namely alcohol and perfume. A 30-minute walk down main street in Escaldes-Engordany (Andorra's main city) revealed no less than two perfumeries per block – math isn't a strong suit of ours but that equates to a heck of a lot of bottled fragrances in the city, just waiting to be bought. And with the county's relatively low VAT of 4.5 per cent, that's certainly money well spent on your girlfriend's next birthday present, or a bottle of premium wine to impress your boss.

Pro tip: Check out the Pyrenees Andorra shopping centre. Like a European version of Takashimaya, it stocks everything from luxury fashion labels to electronics, all under one massive roof.

TAKE RELAXATION TO THE NEXT LEVEL

If your idea of a spa is limited to "Massage" parlours at Joo Chiat, get ready to have your mind blown. Housed in a glittering glass tower in the heart of Escaldes-Engordany, (Andorra's main city), **Inúu** is a super-high-tech integrated wellness centre (or thermal spa) dedicated to revitalising body and mind in the most luxurious way possible. Supplied with mineral-rich thermal water from natural sources, just taking an hour-long soak in the baths is said to promote healing and anti-allergic effects. And if you get bored of that, there're always the waterbeds, saunas, gym, rock-salt room (great for relieving respiratory problems), steam room, different-pressured showers, massages and heated hammocks – which are possibly the best invention since Velcro. We would know, having fallen asleep on one for 40 minutes right after our Swedish massage. To sum it up, this place is like Disneyland for aching people who desperately need to unwind.



Price of base admission: €65 per person. Minimum age for admission to Inúu: 16 years old.

Pro tip: Relax on a Jacuzzi waterbed in the outdoor bath situated on the roof of Inúu, while watching the sunset. The cold winter air combined with the warm water and incredible view creates an unbeatable multi-sensory experience that will magically melt away all the stress you've accumulated over the years. **FHM**



Room and Board

Now that flights have been sorted, it's time to find a place to lay your head...



Hotel Plaza

With a prime location two minutes away from the shopping district, this charming five-star hotel is right in the city centre and has spacious rooms, spa facilities and two in-house restaurants that serve classic Catalan (Andorra borders the Catalan area of Spain) fare.



Hotel Ski Plaza

If you can't get enough of the snow activities, this hotel provides ski equipment rental and is situated within walking distance from a cable car that will transport you right to the Grandvalira slopes. You could probably just live in your ski gear the entire time you're there.



Hotel Mu

Located in the scenic valley of Ordino, this cow-themed hotel is perfect for families or younger travellers because it has a game room where you can start a foosball or air-hockey war.

Visit www.plazandorra.com for more information.