

PRESS RELEASE



s“We live for that” — SalzburgerLand, where talent thrives

Exceptional conditions for elite athletes

For generations, SalzburgerLand has been at the forefront of winter sports, making history time and again. Legendary athletes such as Annemarie Moser-Pröll, Felix Gottwald, Alexandra Meissnitzer, Stefan Kraft and Marcel Hirscher have all played a part in earning the province worldwide respect for its outstanding achievements. The impressive concentration of winter sports professionals across all disciplines is no coincidence: inspirational role models, close-knit communities, top-notch training conditions and excellent schools, combined with professional development systems, create the perfect environment for rising stars to establish themselves. International events, such as the 2025 FIS Alpine World Ski Championships in Saalbach, further enhance the province’s reputation, serving as a powerful source of motivation for young talent.

We live for that — world-class winter athletes, then and now

For generations, SalzburgerLand has consistently produced top athletes across every discipline of winter sports. These athletes not only maintain their place at the pinnacle of their sport but also break new records.

- **Annemarie Moser-Pröll** from **Kleinarl** dominated the sport between the 1968/1969 and 1979/1980 seasons, winning the overall World Cup six times and claiming 63 World Cup victories. Only Lindsey Vonn and Michaela Shiffrin have surpassed her achievements.
- **Petra Kronberger** became a double Olympic champion in 1992 and a downhill World Champion in 1991. The skier from **Werfenweng** won the overall World Cup three times and was the first female alpine skier to win in all five disciplines. Today, she serves as the Women’s Commissioner for the Austrian Ski Association.
- Nordic combined skier **Felix Gottwald** from **Zell am See** is Austria’s most successful Olympian of all time, with a total of seven medals.
- **Alexandra Meissnitzer** from **Abtenau** overcame injuries to carve out her own sporting legacy. She claimed three Olympic medals, won the overall World Cup once and is a two-time World Champion. Today, she is an entrepreneur, TV presenter and a SalzburgerLand ambassador.
- **Triple World Champion Hermann Maier** won the overall World Cup five times. In his 269 World Cup starts, the skier from **Flachau** stood on the podium 96 times and claimed gold in 59 of those races. After a dramatic crash in the downhill, Maier made a remarkable comeback, becoming a double Olympic champion and earning the nickname “Herminator”. His fall and recovery are legendary in the world of sports.

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- **Marlies Raich (née Schild)** is one of the most successful slalom skiers in World Cup history, with 35 slalom victories to her name. In addition, the athlete from **Saalfelden** has won three Olympic silver medals and one bronze, along with two World Championship titles.
- **Michaela Kirchgasser** from **Filzmoos** claimed four gold medals in team events at World Championships, as well as a silver in slalom and two bronze medals in the combined event.
- **Bernhard Gruber**, hailing from **Gastein**, is the most successful Nordic combined skier in the history of the Austrian Ski Association, with an 18-year World Cup career and numerous medals to his name. He reached the Olympic podium four times and earned a total of three gold, three silver and three bronze medals at World Championships, along with three Austrian national titles.
- Ski superstar **Marcel Hirscher** from **Annaberg** holds an incredible world record with eight consecutive overall World Cup titles. In 245 World Cup starts up until 2019, he secured 67 victories and 138 podium finishes. Now, Hirscher is making a highly anticipated comeback and will compete for the Netherlands starting with the upcoming season.
- Snowboarder **Andreas Prommegger** from **St. Johann im Pongau** is a three-time overall World Cup winner and a World Champion. He competes in both the parallel giant slalom and parallel slalom events.
- **Stefan Kraft** from **Schwarzach im Pongau** has an impressive list of achievements. He's won the overall World Cup three times, secured 43 World Cup victories and has a record 119 podium finishes. On top of that, he has claimed four gold, six silver and eight bronze medals at World Championships. Not only is he an Olympic champion, but he also holds the world record in ski flying, with a jump of 253.5 metres.

Saalbach Hinterglemm: from idyllic mountain village to global event destination

Skiing where the champions train: many skiers are familiar with the slopes where world-class athletes get their start. Ski resorts like Altenmarkt-Zauchensee, Dachstein-West, Zell am See-Kaprun, Flachau, Filzmoos, Gastein and Saalbach Hinterglemm have become famous thanks to their homegrown talent. Internationally televised events like World Cup races and World Championships have further boosted their reputation. One such event is the 2025 FIS Alpine World Ski Championships in Saalbach. From 6 to 14 February 2025, the world's attention will turn to the village in Pinzgau, as 600 athletes from 75 nations compete. Each race will see up to 15,000 fans packing the grandstands at the finish line.

One Mountain — All Events

The 2025 FIS Alpine Ski World Championships in Saalbach will have several standout features. One of the most notable is noted in the motto “One Mountain — All Events”. All eleven medal events are set to take place on the Zwölferkogel mountain. What’s even more unique is that anyone with a valid ski pass will be able to watch the races from the slopes, with no disruption to normal skiing. In fact, skiers from neighbouring resorts like Leogang or Fieberbrunn can even ski in to catch the action. And in keeping with a commitment to sustainability, the event is being planned as a certified “Green Event Salzburg”.

“Generation Winter” — the power of role models

“Role models are hugely important for young athletes across all generations,” says Marcel Hirscher, the eight-time overall World Cup champion, now a businessman and father. “For me, it was Hermann Maier. I still remember waking up in the middle of the night as an eight-year-old to watch his downhill race at the 1998 Nagano Olympics. Then he had that horrific crash. Two days later, he came back and won Olympic gold in the Super-G. Those are the kind of childhood memories that really stick with you.” Marcel Hirscher, world record holder and one of the most successful ski racers ever, captures perfectly how role models can shape aspirations.

In SalzburgerLand, it’s not just the sport and the slopes that are everywhere — it’s the people, too. Rising star and Junior World Ski Championships silver medallist Lukas Passrigger from Kleinarl laughs when asked about his role model: “That’s an easy one. It’s Marcel Hirscher, of course. He had this incredible will to win and did everything possible to succeed. Whether in terms of his physical preparation or the right equipment, he left nothing to chance. That’s really inspiring.” At just 21, Passrigger is considered one of Austria’s great hopes, excelling in the technical events and making his debut in the Austrian Ski Association’s B-team for the 2022/23 season.

Currently flying the flag for SalzburgerLand in the Alpine Ski World Cup are Roland Leitinger, Stefan Brennsteiner and Miriam Puchner.

Efficient training in alpine and Nordic skiing

Alongside the numerous ski clubs where children and teenagers get their first taste of competition, the Salzburg Ski Association has become a highly effective talent factory for future stars of the Austrian Ski Association (or ÖSV). Founded in 1911, this branch of the ÖSV is made up of 110 clubs across SalzburgerLand, and, based on its track record, it’s the most successful regional association in Austria. It brings together alpine skiing, cross-country skiing, ski jumping, Nordic combined, biathlon, snowboarding and even grass skiing under one roof. One of its key roles is to foster and develop the next generation of athletes.

The ski schools in SalzburgerLand also play a crucial role. Their success lies in helping young talent juggle their academic education with the demands of training for a career in top-level sport. Several schools offer this dual path for boys and girls:

- ***Higher Institute for Tourism and Skiing — Bad Hofgastein***

At this six-year ski hotel management school, student-athletes can pursue both their academic studies and athletic careers in a balanced dual programme. The schedule is carefully designed: starting in October, students

alternate weekly between the classroom and the ski slopes. During theory weeks, mornings are spent in class for five hours, followed by 3.5 hours of physical training in the afternoon. Among the school's most famous graduates are Marcel Hirscher and Anna Veith (née Fenninger). www.ts-badhofgastein.at

- **Federal Gymnasium and Sports Real Gymnasium IB Saalfelden**

This school focuses heavily on nurturing competitive athletes. Students can specialise in disciplines such as "Alpine Skiing", "Cross-Country Skiing", "Nordic Combined" or "Freestyle", and complete their education with the Austrian Matura (secondary school exit exam). Notable graduates include Nordic combined star Stefan Rettenegger and biathlete Lisa Hauser.

www.gymnasium-saalfelden.at

- **Nordic Middle School Saalfelden**

In Saalfelden, academics and sports training are perfectly balanced. Young athletes specialising in cross-country skiing, ski jumping, Nordic combined and biathlon receive a solid education while being able to focus intensely on their sport. Biathlon stars Dominik Landertinger and Katharina Innerhofer both began their athletic careers here. www.schmittelschule.at

From the classroom to the slopes — training right at home

With over 4,000 kilometres of ski runs, state-of-the-art lifts and easy access to winter sports resorts, you're never far from the next slope in SalzburgerLand. The region's reliable snow conditions are another huge plus. Many resorts across the province offer dedicated, private slopes where young athletes can train under race-like conditions, helping them gear up for the competition season. Kitzsteinhorn, SalzburgerLand's only glacier ski resort, has been a top training spot for more than 50 years, attracting the world's elite alpine skiers. Other well-loved training areas include the slopes at World Cup resorts like Altenmarkt-Zauchensee, Flachau and Saalbach, as well as Obertauern, Gastein Valley and Maria Alm/Hinterreit. The Hinterreit slopes are meticulously groomed by Peter Hörl, widely regarded as a "master of slope preparation" by both Austrian athletes and the global ski community.

SalzburgerLand and its ski jumping legends

SalzburgerLand has long been a breeding ground for ski jumping talent, especially in the towns of Schwarzach and Saalfelden. Building on this proud tradition, the Schwarzach Ski Jumping Centre opened in 2013, providing young athletes with state-of-the-art facilities. With four ski jumps, they can train with their coaches to perfect their technique, improve fitness and build competitive skills.

Today, SalzburgerLand is home to some of the sport's biggest stars. Stefan Kraft from Taxenbach is an Olympic champion, three-time World Champion, Four Hills Tournament winner and holds the ski flying world record at 253.50 metres. Joining him on the World Cup circuit are Daniel Huber from Seekirchen and Jan Hörl from SC Bischofshofen.

Perfect conditions for Nordic sports athletes

Theresa Stadlober from Radstadt, who won bronze at the 2022 Olympics and biathlete Simon Eder from Saalfelden am Steinernen Meer are currently SalzburgerLand's top Nordic sports athletes. With an extensive network of around 4,000 kilometres of well-maintained cross-country trails, SalzburgerLand is a true haven for cross-country skiing. The Ritzensee Cross-Country Ski Centre in Saalfelden Leogang is a top destination, offering 150 kilometres of trails, including a World Championship course and floodlit tracks, along with specialised hotels, ski schools, a Fun & Snow Park and top-tier rental equipment.

The Gastein Valley is another dream spot for cross-country skiing, with over 45 kilometres of groomed trails. The snow-sure High-Altitude Trail in Sportgastein, located at 1,600 metres, guarantees excellent training conditions well into spring. Local legend and former Nordic combined athlete Bernhard Gruber organised the "Gastein Classics" in December 2022, which kicked off the renowned "Ski Classics" series, with further events taking place in locations such as Pustertal and Engadin.

In the park or off-piste — freeride and freestyle

The Kitzsteinhorn mountain is a top spot for freestyle skiing and snowboarding, known for offering some of the best training conditions in the world. The superpipe is kept in perfect condition by head shaper Albert Zehetner and his team, who have been perfecting their craft here for over a decade. Zehetner's expertise has even been showcased at the Olympics — he's shaped the halfpipe twice, including for the Pyeongchang Games. Olympic champions and world champions regularly return to Kitzsteinhorn in the autumn to train, trusting the skill and professionalism of the shaper crew.

Another must-visit freestyle destination is the "Absolut Park" at the Shuttleberg ski resort in Flachauwinkl-Zauchensee. It's one of the biggest and most famous snowparks in the Alps, stretching 1.5 kilometres with six sections and around 100 obstacles. The 160-metre-long superpipe, with its 30-metre-wide, 5.6-metre-high walls, is a favourite among pros like Olympic snowboard champion Anna Gasser, as well as several European national teams. The park is set to celebrate its 25th anniversary in the 2024/2025 season.