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“In the Champions League of winter sports”

The forthcoming Alpine World Ski Championships will take place in St. Moritz. The jet-set destination in Engadine has extensive experience of organising international sporting events.

RENÉ WEBER

“Top of the World” is an unmistakeable advertising slogan – St. Moritz is a brand and a location unlike any other. The fame of the upmarket ski resort has always gone hand in hand with sporting events. The ski marathon, two Winter Olympic Games, the “White Turf” horse race and several Alpine World Ski Championships have helped to make St. Moritz what it is today.

From 6 to 19 February, the Alpine World Ski Championships will be held in Engadine for the fifth time, following 1934, 1948, 1974 and 2003. That is a record. “We’re starting to get excited,” says Hugo Wetzel, Organising Committee President. This veteran knows what he is talking about when

Franco Giovanoli, Director of the Alpine World Ski Championships in St. Moritz, was a snowboarder in the days when the sport first emerged.



it comes to his job. When the last World Championships event was held here 13 years ago, he presided over it along with Martin Berthod, Head of Race Organisation. The new Director of Sport, Franco Giovanoli, is now benefiting from their experience. This former snowboarder has been working on February’s 60 million Swiss franc event since 2014. His predecessor, Gian

Gilli, also changed career – the Director of Sport for the 2003 World Championships came from cross-country skiing.

It is remarkable that not just 48-year-old Giovanoli himself comes from St. Moritz, but all the key positions on the Organising Committee have been filled with local people. “St. Moritz is part of the Champions League of winter sports, so to speak. We’re very proud of that,” explains Hanspeter Danuser, Director of the St. Moritz tourist board from 1978 to 2008. Lots of people from Engadine are involved in these events, he says. The priority is to ensure that thanks to the World Championships the destination remains at the very pinnacle of mountain holiday resorts.

A celebration but no festival hut

The World Ski Championships will adopt the maxim of “take your time”. The aim is to enjoy the greatest luxury there is – that of time. In addition to the competitions, the fringe programme will therefore play a major role. Giovanoli promises a vibrant and diverse World Championships. The opening celebration, victory ceremonies and start-list draws will not take place on the Schulhausplatz, as in 2003, but instead in the historic Kulm Park. This green space hosted the Winter Olympic Games in 1928 and 1948. The heritage-protected pavilion has been specially restored for the World Championships. Celebrations will also take place in the pedestrian zone where a street festival featuring a wide range of events will be held. The national reception centres will also be located there. “It has everything to ensure the fans enjoy themselves,” points out Giovanoli. Or-

ganising Committee President Wetzel is nevertheless keen to ensure St. Moritz is not turned into a “festival hut” like Kitzbühel during the World Championships. “We want to appeal to our own target group,” says Wetzel.

Those responsible for the World Championship slopes, which have all been tried and tested at the World Cup, have few concerns. The infrastructure at the Salastrains venue has been upgraded and the site expanded. Over 120 containers have been installed, and the grandstand for 5,000 spectators is ready.

With 1,300 volunteers

With World Championships ambassadors such as Dario Cologna, Maria Höfl-Riesch, Nino Schurter, Marcel Hirscher, Christian Gross, Nino Niederreiter and Nicola Spirig, the Organising Committee will bang the drum until the start of the event. “Then we will throw a party for the 140,000 fans,” remarks Giovanoli.

And the 1,300 volunteers will have their own centre at the Schulhaus Grevas school building. Here they can meet up, chat and look forward to the 2026 Winter Olympic Games, assuming they actually take place in Grisons and, of course, in St. Moritz in ten years’ time.

On Sunday, 12 February, during the Alpine World Ski Championships, the people of Grisons will vote on the first loans for the million-franc project. The fact that the Organising Committee of the Alpine World Ski Championships supports the Olympic bid goes without saying.

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