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Confessions of an All-Inclusive Convert

Hot take: Stays like Club Med allow personal space in family adventures. **By Aja Ng**



Clockwise from above: The gondola of Club Med Sahoro in Hokkaido; a pint-sized ski lesson; the author and her family, mid-Club Med holiday. Opposite, top left: Candy Land is open for business!

ARE WE REALLY GOING to Club Med?" my best friend asked. On the cusp of my third visit to Club Med Hokkaido (and her first), I was undoubtedly a convert.

Later, I met another friend for lunch. She'd just skied in Changbaishan, northeast China. "Why didn't you say?" she whispered. "Say what?" I whispered back. We were on the 75th floor of Merdeka 118, lunching in the hushed surrounds of the Park Hyatt Kuala Lumpur.

"That it would be SO easy, and so great!"

Like me, she'd spent months mentally prepping her husband for the imminent Club Med visit: the daily shows, buffet meals, and chirpy G.O.s. The kids would love it, but our grumpy husbands used to their own space...different story. She'd even mapped out alternative escapes nearby just in case.

Ski holidays with children are no easy feat. Besides flights and accommodation, one has to rent gear, schedule lessons, get lift passes, plan transport to the mountain, meals and family-friendly après ski. And let's not forget the workout it takes to get kids into ski gear daily.

So, when I visited Club Med Kiroro Grand in 2022 with my then eight-year-old, I experienced something new. It was peace, and even pockets of loneliness. It was the magic of Club Med; my daughter had the time of her life.

I sold it to my husband. "Imagine dropping them off to the Mini Club at 8:30 a.m., us having a coffee before hitting the mountain. The kids will learn to ski happily with friends, we check in on them at lunch, then at 4:30 p.m. we pick them up. Quality time over dinner, watch the show, bedtime, repeat. We'll have an actual holiday."

With our kids currently aged 10 and four, a Club Med ski holiday was the answer. The peace of mind that comes with everything so conveniently taken care of is unbeatable. The

GLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF CLUB MED (2); AJA NG



only decision to make was if I wanted to onsen before or after dinner. I could ski, sanity intact.

I thoroughly researched the three ski-in, ski-out, kid-friendly Club Meds in Hokkaido. In the east, the newest, in Kiroro, an area said to have more powder per season than Niseko, averaging 21 metres! With 266 rooms, it felt pretty grand. But everyone is there over the winter.

West of central Hokkaido there's Club Med Tomamu, which opened in 2018. There's more to do in the vicinity, but I didn't like the look of the neighbours: 30-storey towers right next to the mountain. Reviews had mentioned that the 341-room hotel was very spread out, with long walks between facilities.

I settled on Club Med Sahoro, a 177-room property in the Shintoku region. Guests praised the cosiness, genuine ski-in, ski-out setup, and Mount Sahoro's groomed runs. It was uncrowded, they said, untouched. Exactly what I needed to hear. The final bit of apprehension was because Sahoro was Club Med's first foray into Japan, opened in 1987.

The day finally arrived and we checked in smoothly. At 40-ish square metres, our Family Deluxe Room didn't feel too compact; we had a king-sized bed and the two kids on the tatami, and ample storage space to hide away six days' worth of clothing and ski gear for four. It certainly didn't feel old—they'd refreshed in 2019. »

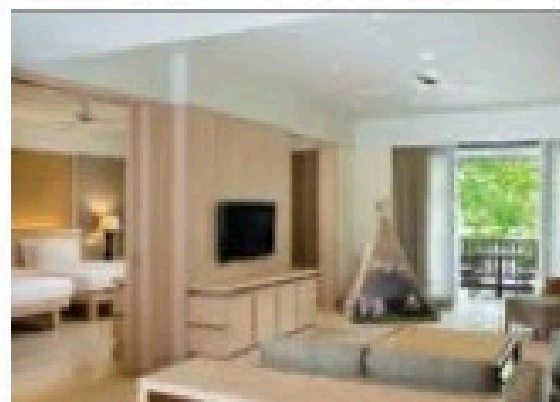


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Our rentals sorted and everyone signed up for skiing lessons, we had a lavish buffet dinner at The Daichi before watching our first Club Med performance. My son, Django, was entranced.

In the following days, he would be up on stage in various roles. My daughter made new friends from Hong Kong, Melbourne and Bangkok. My husband and I would frantically catch each other's eye and physically bat candy out of our children's reach when all the kids went amok because the hotel declared "Candy Land" open one night. I would have one of the best massages of my life at the spa. My son's ski instructor would corner me on the dance floor of The Wakka to show me videos of him skiing. One evening, we all ran out in the snow in the pitch-black alpine night without jackets and boots just to see how cold it was. We would fall into a routine, everyone comfortable, well-rested, adequately exercised, and mentally stimulated.

Coming away happy, my husband declared that for the first time in a decade, he had visibly improved his ski technique. My kids hummed the Club Med Sahoro ditty daily.

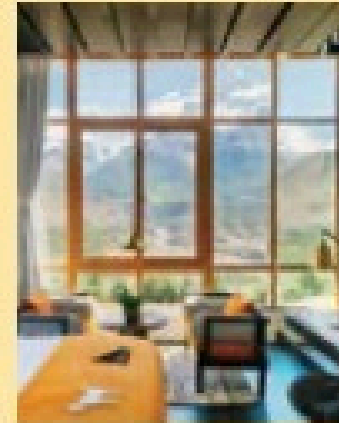
Two days after we left, my friend texted me, suggesting spring ski in France. "I have a better idea," I told her.

And that's how I found myself with two new converts and six kids, locked in for our next all-inclusive trip. 🌐



One of those kids is ours.

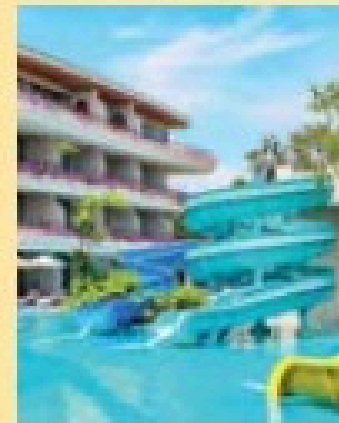
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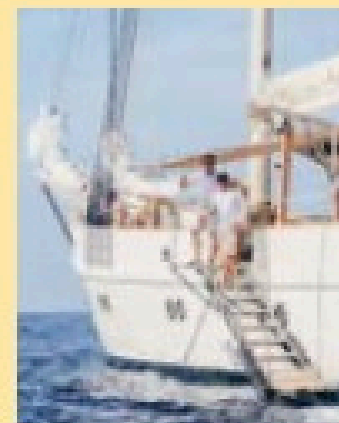
be it trekking, biking, spa or cultural discoveries. shintamani.com; from US\$950 per person, per night



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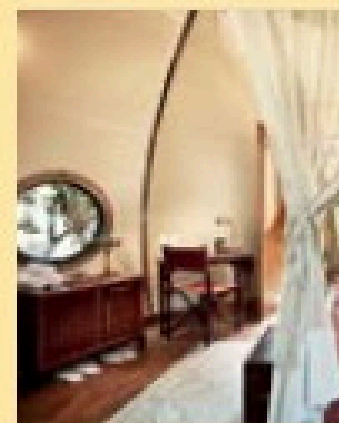
charm far removed from its neighbour's hustle. Thirty kilometres long and minimally developed, its appeal lies in pristine beaches framed with coconut palms and rustic fishing villages, whilst Anantara fills in all the luxuries. anantara.com; doubles from US\$942 per night



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four-poster beds, hardwood floors and plush furnishings. Spot leopards, sloth bears, elephants, and innumerable peacocks on the daily included game drives, and don't forget to take tea in the jungle. resplendentceylon.com; doubles from US\$1,410 per night