What is a ski area?

In order to compare the size of different ski areas, suitable parameters have to be established as well as a uniform and exact definition of what constitutes the delimitation of the ski area. This is particularly relevant in the Alps with their cross-border lift carousels and regional ski passes and one has to distinguish between ski areas and ski regions.

A ski area is defined as an area which is connected by cable cars and lifts and/or ski runs (pistes and marked ski routes), excluding unmarked and not secured off-piste runs. This means that a lift pass which includes a shuttle bus between two ski areas does not turn the two into one area (f.e. Skiwelt Wilder Kaiser and Kitzbühel in Tyrol) whereas a connecting cable car does - even if one can not change from one area to the other on a ski run (f.e. Silvretta Montafon in Vorarlberg)

Particularly in the larger resorts which extend across numerous valleys, it is possible that some sections are separated from each other by roads which can not be crossed by a skier bridge or tunnel. Skis or boards have to be taken off and carried across. As long as the distance of the pedestrian crossing does not exceed 400 meters, these are considered as one area. If a shuttle bus is provided, all the better, but a distance of 500 meters establishes two ski areas. This is the case at Flachauwinkel where the opposing sides of the valley provide access to the ski areas of Zauchensee and Kleinarl as well as at Megève.

Here is another example illustrating this: In Sankt Anton at the Arlberg, the Rendl had to be considered as a separate ski area until 2008/09. Since the base station was relocated close to the Galzig cable car base station in 2009 (a distance of only 130 meters compared to 600 meters previously), both mountains are part of the of a larger ski area which also includes Valluga, Gampen and Albona. The Arlberg ski pass also includes access to the slopes at Lech and Zürs but as a shuttle bus has to be used to access the ski area of Valluga-Galzig-Gampen-Rendl-Albona from there. Therefore Lech and Zürs are consideres as a separate ski area.

While this differentiation seems petty-minded, it is of great importance in the ranking of the Top 100. Portes du Soleil, the international ski region between Champéry in Switzerland und Morzine in France is promoted as the largest skiing area in the world with 650 kilometers of pistes but it actually consists of two large and numerous smaller ski areas that are not lift linked to each other.

If one decreases the threshold value of the distance to be done on foot to get from one area to the next to 200 meters, the two large resorts of the Portes du Soleil would turn into four. In Morgins as well as in Les Gets distances between the base stations at both ends of the villages are 300 meters.

The threshold value may seem arbitrary but it is internationally recognized as the ‚walking distance' that is used when planning accommodation, parking spaces and other infrastructure.

A special case are ski areas which are physically connected but do not offer interchangeable lift tickets, f.e. at Deer Valley and Park City in Utah or at Big Sky and Yellowstone Club in Montana. In the first case, one can purchase two tickets (expensive but possible) whereas in the second case an invitation by a club member of the private ski resort Yellowstone Club is required (possible but unlikely).

Contact



Montenius Consult
Christoph Schrahe

Diesterwegstraße 29
51109 Köln
Phone.: +49 221 94653533
Fax: +49 221 94653534
Mobile: +49 177 8340052
Email: schrahe [at] montenius.com