

Rich Indian kids troop to Swiss camps this summer

As the weather swings between blistering sunshine and sporadic showers in India, super rich parents are packing off their wards to the cooler climes of Swiss Alps for an 'international experience' at summer schools and camps there.

It is a great global exposure for the young ones, say their elite mothers who feel European summer camps are the best personality training ground for the children who will perhaps lead family businesses or start their own enterprises someday.

The hottest summer camp this year is on the iciest of slopes at Verbier, located in one of the most beautiful regions in the Swiss Alps, opposite the Le Grand Combin mountain looming at 4,300 metres.

At least 140 Indian children aged between 8 and 18 are spending an adventure-packed fortnight skiing down the icy slopes, mountain biking, trekking to see the famous Mont Blanc, journeying the terrain on tram, trains and cable cars, rock climbing, paragliding, exploring the natural trails, learning European languages and inculcating team and leadership spirits at Les Elfes, one of the best Swiss summer schools for children in the world, in Verbier.

The 21-year-old international summer school offers education and adventure courses to young adults from more than 65 countries across the world.

'We keep the children away from the din of the tourist trails in Verbier on our exclusive property and hire the best of teachers to instruct them. We also ensure round-the-clock medical facilities because most Indian children are new to Alpine adventure sports,' Rachna Chawla, coordinator for Les Elfes in India, told IANS.

The participant list this season reads like a star-studded cast. One of the country's top socialites, Queenie Dhody, has sent her teenaged daughter Tiara to the camp. Dhody could not be reached for comment because she was holidaying in Monte Carlo.

Fashion designer Haseena Jethmalani, daughter-in-law of noted lawyer Ram Jethmalani, is relieved that the camp is taking good care of daughter Serena, while Shivani Modi is thrilled that her daughter Jayati is spending her summer holidays in an exotic locale like Verbier.

The cost, Rs.125,000 per child at the base level, counts little when compared to the activities and the exposure that they get in the camp.

'I have sent both my daughters, Haripriya and Priyambada (aged 14 and 11) to the camp. It is perhaps the best in the world,' Deepali Dalmia of the industrialist Dalmia family told the IANS.

A conservative couple, Deepali and her husband allowed their daughters to attend the camp because the girls were part of a group of seven friends.

'All of them are children of our family friends. The fact that they are part of a familiar group ensures a high level of comfort,' she said. The couple plans to pick up their daughters in Geneva after two weeks.

Switzerland is dotted with exclusive summer schools, nestled in the picturesque slopes of the Alps. The 40-year-old International Summer Camp at Montana in Switzerland combines language, fun and adventure sports for boys and girls between 8 and 17 years of age from across the globe.

The Ecole Suisse De Langues at Leysin offers French language and courses in skiing for children from April to October every year, while the pricey International Camp Suisse hosts a 13-day round-the-clock activity schedule comprising Alpine adventures and European languages every year.

The camps, which begin with skiing programmes in early April, turn into foreign language and adventure sports classes in June and late July, when the snow thins.

Sunita Aeren, wife of top-line businessman Sanjeev J. Aeren, said she wanted 16-year-old daughter Sanya to experience something new. 'She wanted to go to Switzerland because she had never been to a summer camp abroad,' Sunita told IANS.

Most parents opt for Switzerland because it allows their children the opportunity to ski. 'Skiing is a new activity for our children. They don't get to ski in the domestic summer camps,' Sunita said.

'They get to do much - eat the local food, meet new people, experience a new environment and learn foreign languages like Spanish, German and French. This is the age when children can pick up new things,' Sunita said.

According to Sapna Aeren, director of Aeren R. Enterprises owned by husband Rajesh J. Aeren, foreign summer camps are good grooming classes. Her daughter Shagun, who has just finished school (Class 10 board examination), is camping in Switzerland.

'My daughter is not an outgoing child, but she wanted to do something exciting this time. This activity class in Switzerland is helping her open up and speak for herself,' she says.

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