

PEOPLE . PLACES

BEYOND THE SLOPES: ALPINE CHALLENGES

6 x 30' (ENG, GER; EP6 only GER)

The Alps are more than just a winter wonderland—they are a crossroads where tradition, nature, and modern challenges collide.

This series takes viewers deep into the heart of Europe's most famous mountain range uncovering the critical issues that define its future. From the effects of climate change on winter tourism to the growing danger of rockslides, from the extremes of mountaineering to the financial forces transforming iconic landscapes, this series highlights both the triumphs and struggles of those who call the Alps home.

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1. Winter Tourism in the Alps – Between Euphoria and Distress

Swiss winter sports resorts want to get back to normal, but global problems have crept up the mountain slopes. After a two-year tourism slump due to the pandemic, mountain holidays are in great demand. Guests are coming in large numbers, and the bookings promise hoteliers and ski lifts an excellent season. But climate change is changing our winters. Ski resorts can no longer operate without artificial snow. High electricity prices and a shortage of skilled workers are adding to the pressure on the industry.

2. Snow Machines: Battling Climate Change on the Slopes

Ski resorts have long been increasingly relying on artificial snow. In Italy, 90 percent of the slopes are already covered with machine-made snow. But how does modern snowmaking work today? And what conditions are needed? Spend a season on the road with Stefan Megert, head snowmaker at the Davos Klosters ski lifts. But there are also places where conventional snowmaking systems are no longer sufficient. A special "snow factory" is therefore used at the Swiss biathlon base in Lenzerheide, which can also work at temperatures above zero. For Nordic skiing, which mostly takes place at lower altitudes, climate change is a particular challenge, says Riikka Rakic, Head of Sustainability at the International Biathlon Union. With the help of climate data, researchers can simulate how snow reliability will develop over the next few decades. Fabian Wolfsperger from the Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research says that technical snow can compensate for the decline in natural snow quite well - but not on all slopes; it will be particularly difficult for valley runs.

3. Rockslides: A Growing Threat in the Alps

The Alps are crumbling due to climate change – at a faster pace than expected. This episode dives into the alarming effects of climate change on Switzerland's high mountain regions, where rising temperatures, rapidly thawing the permafrost, and intense rainfall are accelerating the destabilization. Above Kandersteg, a staggering 20 million cubic meters of rock at Spitzer Stein shift 20 centimeters per day—and up to 80 centimeters when it rains. Interviews with geophysicists and geologists reveal the advanced techniques used to monitor these massive rock movements and secure the Alpine passes as well as the urgent measures needed to adapt to the new reality. Their predictions have already been surpassed, posing serious risks to structures like the Swiss Alpine Club huts, some of which may need to be abandoned. The documentary highlights the urgent need to understand and adapt to these changes, as once-stable Alpine areas face an uncertain future.

4. The Ultimate Alpine Challenge: 82 Peaks in 51 Days

Join two renowned adventurers and elite athletes on their groundbreaking quest. Christian Maurer and Peter von Känel want to conquer all 82 of the Alps' 4,000-meter peaks—by foot and paraglider, with no support team in sight. No one has ever achieved this feat before. Starting from their home in Frutigen, in the heart of the Bernese Oberland, the duo carries all their gear, venturing into uncharted alpine territory where no one has dared to go. This thrilling documentary follows them as they push the limits of human endurance, setting new standards in adventure and exploration.

5. Swiss Mountains for Sale: The Investor Takeover

Vail Resorts, the American ski resort operator, has become a major player in Switzerland's mountain regions. With the Epic Pass, an annual subscription offering access to all 42 Vail Resorts globally, American visitors can now ski in Switzerland without limits. This trend highlights the growing interest of international investors in Swiss ski resorts, which are vital to the local economy and identity. Thomas Egger, Director of the Swiss Mountain Regions Association, questions why Switzerland, one of the wealthiest nations, relies on foreign investors for its mountain infrastructure. In contrast, Lenzerheide offers an example of an independently operated resort. The majority of its mountain lifts are owned by the municipality, which protects the area from speculative investors.

6. Matterhorn: The Deadly Peak

The Matterhorn is one of the most famous peaks in the world and also one of the deadliest. Since it was first climbed in 1865, more than 600 mountaineers have lost their lives here, seven in 2024 alone. Despite modern infrastructure and international fame, the Matterhorn remains the scene of numerous tragedies.