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Travel

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The ultimate guide to summer holidays in the Alps

The hills are alive with holiday fever, here's why you should trade the Med for the mountains and where to go

By Sarah Baxter

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Is it all change in the Alps? Skiing has been the big draw across the range for much of the past century: Thomas Cook first offered ski packages in 1908, and most mountain resorts now depend on skiing for 75 per cent of their earnings. But with temperatures rising,

[snow less reliable](#) and weather patterns becoming downright strange, winter tourism is a rapidly changing landscape.

To counter this, [Alpine resorts](#) are putting more effort into attracting summer travellers – more bike trails, running routes, cultural festivals, quirky family fun, astro-tourism, and multifarious types of wellness.

So, is it time to switch our salopettes for shorts and sandals? Especially as, with traditional beach spots increasingly exceeding boiling point, the cooler mountains can provide an escape from the heat.

The concept isn't new, of course. The first Alpine tourists, visiting in the 19th century, came in summer, for clean air and mountaineering. And it was 90 years ago this year that Walter Ingham founded his namesake company – it started with ski holidays, but almost immediately expanded to offer [summer walking trips](#) too.

Still going strong today, Inghams carried out some research in 2023. “We looked at the stats and saw how walking is the most popular pleasure activity for people in the UK, and that it had increased after the pandemic,” says Inghams’ Elise Wortley. “We found that customers are mostly keen on spectacular views, a good range of accommodation options and food.”

Spectacular views are a given in the Alps. But there are ever-more sophisticated ways of admiring them. For instance, you can ride audacious cable cars like [the Matterhorn Alpine Crossing](#) (opened in 2023; [matterhornalpinecrossing.com](#)), hop on [the new gondola to Chamonix’s Mer de Glace](#) ([chamonix.net](#)), step into the magical new Skyway Monte Bianco Infinity Room in [Courmayeur](#) ([montebianco.com](#)) or fly over the Mont Blanc Massif in planes with see-through canopies ([aerocime.com](#)).

Accommodation options continue to develop, too. Take the Brecon ([thebrecon.com](#)), opening in 2024 in the [Swiss village of Adelboden](#), which is aiming to be “more dream home than luxury hotel”. Or chic adults-only Odles Lodge ([odleslodge.it](#)), opened in 2023 in [Italy’s South Tyrol](#), which puts the emphasis on style, freedom and privacy. Tour operator Original Travel has reacted to the trend of walkers wanting fancier places to stay – which they’ve named “bootiquing” – with a new trip in the Dolomites, combining hikes with five-star hotels and a posh refugio-with-wine cellar (five days half-board from £4,975pp, including flights; [originaltravel.co.uk](#)).

Truth is, whether you’re after mindfulness, massage and Michelin stars, or hut-to-hut hiking, mountain cheese and old-fashioned *Gemütlichkeit*, in essence the Alps haven’t changed all that much. We might now be offered “forest bathing” excursions or guided

wild swims. But it's the trees and tarns themselves, and the abundance of fresh air, space and splendour, that really makes this region the perfect summer spot.

Here are 10 glorious ways to enjoy it.

Jump to the best holiday for:

Classic Alps

Families

Culture

Natural wellness

Biking

Mountaineering

High-jinks

Blue therapy

Art

Sport

Best for... Classic Alps

Kitzbühel, Austria

Self-proclaimed “home of sport and lifestyle”, [Kitzbühel](#) is your classic summer Alpine resort, a jaw-dropping Tyrolean playground with an activity, adventure, outlet, excursion or eatery for everyone. There are over 1,000km of footpaths here, winding amid the forests, meadows and mountains. There are also more than 800km of bike routes (including the new-last-year Sonnenrast MTB trails), four world-class golf courses, three bathing lakes, the Alpenblumengarten (home to 400-plus native plants), a wealth of wellness options and [some top-class restaurants](#) – contemporary-French Les Deux Brasserie is one of the latest openings. Expect events all summer, too, including [Pura Vida](#) (July 4-August 22 2024), which sees Thursday evenings filled with yoga, music, food and drinks.



Kitzbühel – 'your classic Alpine resort' | CREDIT: Stefan Fuertbauer

Insider tip: Book a sunrise breakfast trip up the 1,996m Kitzbüheler Horn, which includes traditional brass music and a spread of farmhouse bread, fresh butter and local cheeses.

Nearest airport: Salzburg (1hr 15m), Innsbruck (1hr 20m), Munich (2hr).

How to do it: Inghams (01483 945048; [inghamscot.co.uk](https://www.inghamscot.co.uk)) offers a week at Hotel Kaiserhof from £919pp including B&B accommodation, excluding flights. Macs Adventure (01415 303466; [macsadventure.com](https://www.macsadventure.com)) offers a six-night self-guided Kitzbühel Alpine Trail walk through the Kitzbüheler Alps, from £920pp including B&B accommodation, excluding flights. [Plan the perfect holiday in Kitzbuhel with our guide.](#)

Info: [kitzbuehel.com/en](https://www.kitzbuehel.com/en)

Best for... Families

Vaujany, France

Despite nudging the huge Alpe d'Huez ski area, little [Vaujany](#) has escaped with its mountain-village charm intact. Here, at 1,250m, old farmhouses jostle in a fine natural setting, by a waterfall, facing the Grandes Rousses Massif. But Vaujany also has plenty of mod-cons, including top-notch leisure facilities, making it fantastic for families. Indeed, it's a long-term holder of a "Family Plus" label, with child-friendly offerings ranging from kids clubs to free pram hire.

Best is Vaujany's Collet Centre – renovated last year, and accessible from the village by free petit train, it offers many free activities, from tennis and archery to frisbee golf and petanque; there's a pump track for skaters and bikers too. For summer 2024, the resort is offering six new free family activities, including beekeeping, boat-building and graffiti-ing.



Kidding around: Vaujany holds a 'Family Plus' label – awarded to child-friendly resort | CREDIT: E+

Insider tip: Pick up a Vaujany Discovery Card – free for anyone staying overnight, it covers certain activities and offers reduced rates on others.

Nearest airport: Grenoble (1hr), Lyon (2hrs).

How to do it: Summer France (0203 475 4756; summerfrance.co.uk) offers a week at central Hôtel les Cimes, close to Vaujany's restaurants, shops and cable cars, from £1,185pw in a superior B&B quad (sleeping four), excluding flights.

Info: vaujany.com

Best for... Culture

Engelberg, Switzerland

Just 25km south of Lake Lucerne, Engelberg sits pretty in the peaks of central Switzerland, perched 1,000m up in the shadow of 3,239m Mount Titlis. It's easy to access by train, and even easier to get around, with a free bus connecting all the valley stations, plus 500km of hiking trails and the world's first rotating cableway up Titlis itself.



The Titlis cablecar | CREDIT: Creative-Photography Tanya Hasler

Despite being the largest holiday resort in the region, with a distinctly sporty vibe, it's charming too, thanks to its *belle époque* buildings and Benedictine monastery, founded here in 1120 – explore it on a guided tour or join a cheese-making session in the monastery dairy (chaes-im-kloster.ch). This summer, Engelberg has an additional cultural attraction: Backstage Engelberg (June 21-August 18 2024) will see 40 artists exhibiting in usually private, empty and unseen spaces to create a unique art trail.

Insider tip: Buy Titlis cable car tickets online to avoid queues. Use your Engelberg guest card (available to anyone staying overnight) to get 10% off; holders of a Swiss Travel Pass save 50%.

Nearest airport: Zurich (1hr).

How to do it: The five-star Eienwäldli campsite (00 41 41 637 1949; eienwaeldli.ch) has pitches from around £6.50pppn, doubles in its Sporthotel from £190pn room-only.

Info: engelberg.ch

Best for...Natural wellness

Canazei, Italy

Tucked in the Val di Fassa, flanked by the Dolomites mightiest, most magnificent massifs, Canazei is a natural playground. It's just become quicker to access, thanks to SkyAlps' new twice-weekly spring/summer Gatwick-Bolzano flights (skyalps.com).



'Natural playground': go trekking in the Val di Fassa and recover with a spa treatment | CREDIT: en.photo / Alamy Stock Photo

Also, from May to October, 35 lifts operate in the valley, whisking hikers up to meadows and mountains – walking options range from family strolls to hut-to-hut Trek-King routes right round the Fassa Dolomites. Road cyclists might be inspired to try Giro d'Italia climbs or, less strenuous, something like the Fiemme & Fassa ride along the Avisio River.

Canazei is also a wonderful spot for wellness, including yoga, barefoot paths and forest bathing, Ancient Roman-inspired 'bioclimatological' spa-ing (concerned with the effect of climate and temperature) at Eghes Wellness (dolaondes.it) or dipping in Trentino's only sulphur spring at QC Terme Dolomiti (qcterme.com).

Insider tip: Try a chunk of Puzzzone di Moena, a much-revered semi-hard local cheese that even gets its own festival (September 20-22).

Nearest airport: Bolzano (1hr), Venice (2hr 15m)

How to do it: Lupo Bianco Bio Hotel (00 39 0462 601330; hotellupobianco.it) has B&B doubles from £365 for three nights. A four-day Dolomiti Trek-King Short Experience (fassa.com) costs from £265pp including half-board refuge accommodation.

Best for... Biking

Saalfelden Leogang, Austria

Lonely Planet named [Saalfelden Leogang](https://www.lonelyplanet.com/austria/saalfelden-leogang) one of the ten best travel regions in the world for 2024, on account of its strides towards sustainability and its glut of guided Alpine activities. This Salzburgerland resort is Austria's largest bike area, with over 90km of trails, and a network of lifts and cable cars to take you to them.



Austria's largest bike area has over 90km of trails | CREDIT: Klemens König

Come to watch the UCI Mountain Bike World Series (June 7-9 2024), hit Europe's biggest beginner's Bikepark, join a workshop to pick up riding tips and pedal up on the high plateau. Or plan a relaxed foodie e-bike tour – the region is great for gourmets too, with seven restaurants here sharing 14 Gault&Millau toques (Austria's equivalent of Michelin stars), as well as farmers' markets and family *stubbe* serving creamy cheeses and spicy sausages.

Insider tip: Restore your limbs in the cool lakeside Krallerhof Atmosphere Spa (krallerhof.com), opened in 2023, and designed to blend into the mountains.

Nearest airport: Salzburg (1hr), Innsbruck (1hr 45m), Munich (2hrs).

How to do it: Stay at a “Bike Friendly” hotel such as Puradies (00 43 6583 8275; puradies.com), which offers a three-night Bike In/Bike Out half-board package from £455pp.

Info: saalfelden-leogang.com

Best for... Mountaineering Pralognan-la-Vanoise, France

[Pralognan-la-Vanoise](https://pralognan-la-vanoise.com), sitting below the highest peak in Vanoise National Park, is one of the original homes of mountaineering. Awarded the Terre d’Alpinisme label in 2022 – given to destinations that defend the Unesco-listed Intangible Cultural Heritage of mountaineering – Pralognan continues to draw those who love high places.



Explore the glaciers and lakes of Pralognan | CREDIT: Hemis / Alamy Stock Photo

Although the local population is just 738, there are 35 hiking and mountain guides here (guides-pralognan.com). New excursions for 2024 include an icy glacier trip, a hiking tour to the wildest peaks, and à la carte journeys, ranging from two to eight days, sleeping in mountain huts. Of course, you can hit the 250km of hiking trails alone; there are also chances to try climbing, paragliding, mountain-biking, trail running, via ferrata and more.

Insider tip: Visit for the [Fête del l'Alpe et des Guides](#) (August 10-11 2024), a celebration of mountain guiding that includes talks, rope blessings and a parade.

Nearest airport: Chambéry (1hr).

How to do it: Alpine-style Hôtel les Airelles (00 33 4 7908 7032; hotel-les-aielles.fr) has doubles from £94pn, room-only. Perched at 2,000m, Le Roc de la Pêche refuge (00 33 4 7908 7975; lerocdelapeche.com) offers half-board dorms (£62pppn), doubles (£172pn) and a geodesic stargazing dome (£249pn).

Info: pralognan.com

Best for... High-jinks

Les Diablerets, Switzerland

Up in the Vaud Alps, the views are pretty special. The resort of Les Diablerets, at 1,200m, gazes right at a rocky massif. And, from Glacier 3000, a scenic cablecar ride above the village, you can see the Matterhorn and Mont Blanc. Also at this height you'll find a taste of winter Alps: explore the glacier on foot, by Snowbus or sledge, and go tobogganing on the Alpine Coaster.



The view from the Glacier 3000 cable car | CREDIT: Perreten Ursula / Alamy Stock Photo

Alternatively, test your nerve on the vertiginous Peak Walk, the world's first suspension footbridge between two summits. Settle your nerves afterwards at Glacier 3000's restaurant – reopening this summer following a fire in 2022, it's been redesigned by Swiss architect Mario Botta, with a new panoramic terrace.

Insider tip: Go on a Rando-Raclette – the Tourist Office rents raclette bags (containing stove and lighting kit, plus cheese, sausage, bread and beers), so you can picnic in the Swiss-est of ways.

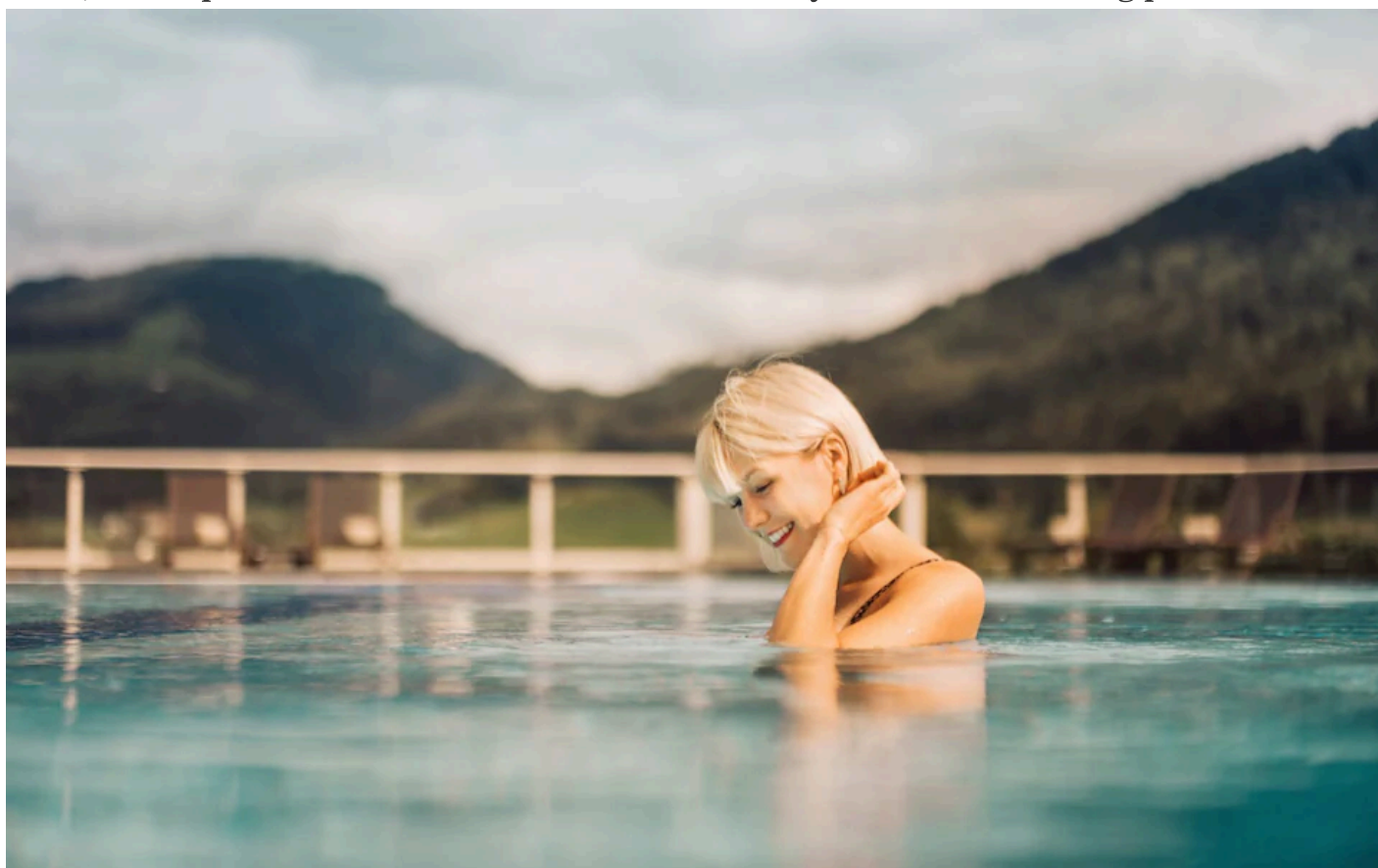
Nearest airport: Geneva (2hrs).

How to do it: Family-run Eurotel Victoria Les Diablerets (00 41 24 492 3721; eurotel-victoria.ch) has B&B doubles from £254pn. Ramble Worldwide (01707 331133; rambleworldwide.co.uk) has a new seven-night guided Les Diablerets trip from £1,899pp including half-board accommodation, leisurely walks and flights; July 19, August 7 2024.

Info: alpesvaudoises.ch; glacier3000.ch

Best for... Blue therapy Schladming Dachstein, Austria

This Styrian eyrie, easily reachable by train from Salzburg, isn't well known by Brits. And yet it's a stunner: sheer limestone walls, green valleys and countless peaks, including the glaciated 2,700m Dachstein; a new solar-powered mountain station is opening here in 2024, with a panoramic restaurant and new "Stairway to Heaven" viewing platform.



Schladming: 'the Valley of the Thousand Springs' | CREDIT: Richard Schabetsberger

Schladming is also known as the Valley of the Thousand Springs, with 300 tarns and 100 waterfalls. You can follow various "water hikes", from the family-friendly Wild Waters path, via 140m-high Riesach Falls, to the route to Caribbean-blue Seekarlsee.

Alternatively, there are rivers to raft, canyons to splash through and ponds to swim in – sites like Pürgg natural pool and Putterersee bathing lake are covered by the resort's free Summercard.

Insider tip: Head to Waldhäuslalm (waldhaeuslalm.at), named Styrian Alpine Hut 2024 in Gault&Milliau's Hutguide – catch a fish in the pond, then take it to the hut to be

barbecued.

Nearest airport: Salzburg (1hr).

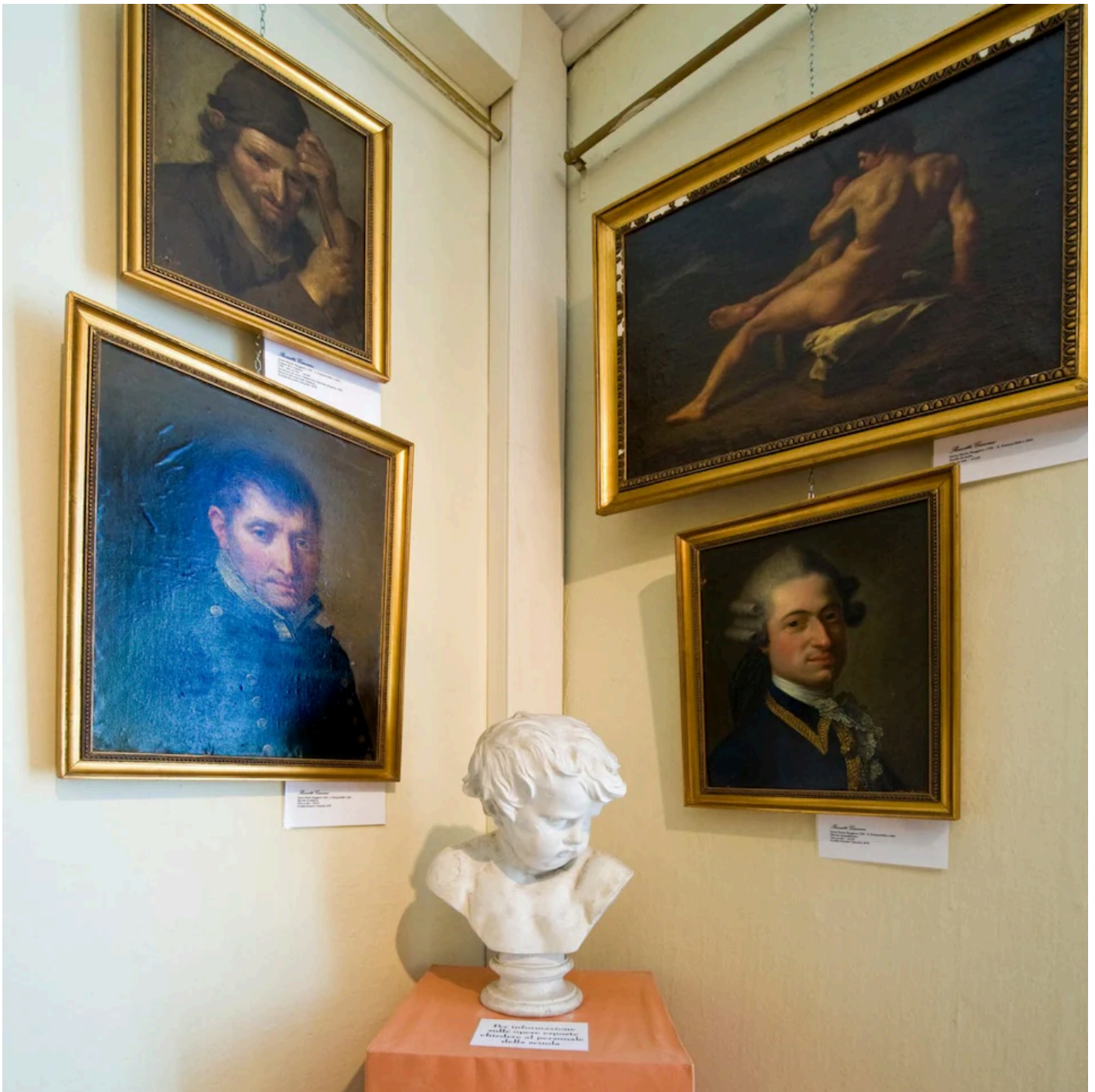
How to do it: Tui (0203 451 2688; tui.co.uk) offers a week at Hotel Planai from £675pp including B&B accommodation and flights. Nature and Wellness Hotel Höflehner (00 43 3686 2548; hoeflehner.com) has an extensive spa; four nights full-board from £585pp.

Info: schladming-dachstein.at

Best for... Art

Santa Maria Maggiore, Italy

The lush Valle Vigezzo, in Piedmont's Lepontine Alps, is also known as the Painters' Valley, on account of how many artists have worked and studied here over the centuries. The mountain village of Santa Maria Maggiore (at 840m) is home to the Rossetti Valentini Fine Arts School (fondazionerossettivalentini.it), founded in 1878 and still hosting courses alongside its impressive gallery.



In the frame: the Rossetti Valentini Fine Art School in Santa Maria Maggiore | CREDIT: AGF Srl / Alamy Stock Photo

The village itself, set amid woods and meadows, is also pretty as a picture, and has more museums: visit the Fragrance House, which celebrates local links to *eau de cologne*, and the Chimney Sweep Museum, which tells the story of Vigezzo's hardworking emigrants. Then explore the great outdoors – follow trails that lead into landscapes painted by local artists or hike the historic Via del Mercato, a 60km mule-track through the Vigezzo Valley, used by traders for centuries.

Insider tip: Travel through the valley via the Vigezzina Centovalli trainline (vigezzinacentovalli.com), which connects Domodossola and Locarno in breathtaking fashion. It's possible to buy one- or two-day hop-on, hop-off tickets (from €6).

Nearest airport: Milan Malpensa (1hr 20m).

How to do it: Small, family-run Hotel Miramonti (00 39 0324 95013; almiramonti.com) has B&B doubles from £112pn.

Info: lagomaggioreexperience.it; visitpiemonte.com

Best for... Sport

Tignes, France

[Tignes](https://tignes.com) bills itself as THE sport and activity resort in the French Alps, with some justification. An official “Terre des Jeux 2024” – a Paris Olympics training camp for various disciplines – it’s geared to outdoor exertions. You can do everything here, from cycling, hiking, trail running and rafting, to kayaking, biathlon, water sports and beach volleyball.



Tignes: play 'the highest golf in Europe' | CREDIT: Hemis / Alamy Stock Photo

At the centre of the resort is Tignespace, a state-of-the-art sport centre, with racket courts, a skate park and climbing wall. Plus, a new 15,000 sq m area of pitches and pétanque courts will open in June. After all that, you may need to head to the Lagon aquatic area for a restorative swim, jacuzzi, steam or massage.

Insider tip: MyTignes passes (€32/€26 adult/child for one week) cover many activities, such as rifle-shooting, tennis and mini-golf. New for 2024, passes also include unlimited access to the funicular up 3,032m Grande Motte.

Nearest airport: Chambéry (2hr), Geneva (2hr 45m).

How to do it: Hacienda-style Ynycio Residence (00 33 4 7910 4915; ynycio.com) is opening in summer for the first time in 2024, with apartments (sleeping 4-8) from £28pppn. Peak Retreats (023 9283 9310; peakretreats.co.uk) offers a week in a two-bed Le Telemark apartment from £1,290, including ferry. [Plan the perfect trip to Tignes with our guide.](#)

Info: tignes.net

FAQs

What will the weather be like?

Varied – these are mountains after all. It can be really hot, cool (to very cold) higher up, with the possibility of summer thunderstorms.

What should I pack?

Layers. Sturdy footwear. Rain gear. Reusable water bottle.

When should I visit?

Summer season is generally June-September. Lifts in higher areas may only run to late August, others stay open into October. Some mountain passes are only accessible July-August.

Getting around: should I drive?

Ideally not. Alpine resorts usually have combinations of trains, buses, chairlifts, gondolas, ebikes and scooters – often covered by good-value or free visitor passes.

Can go skiing in summer?

Yes! You'll need to go high, to glaciers. For instance, Hintertux (Austria) or the Matterhorn Glacier Paradise (Switzerland). [Learn more about skiing in summer here.](#)

The article was first published in July 2023, and has been revised and updated.