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## Ski resorts are so much more enjoyable in summer – here are the best ones to visit

Rediscover your favourite resort in the warmer weather and find a world of crowd-free mountains at a fraction of the price

By Gabriella Le Breton, TRAVEL WRITER

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There's a saying in ski resorts that often surprises visitors: "People come for winter, but stay for the summers."



It can be hard, when you've spent a lifetime regarding mountains as an exclusively winter holiday option, to reimagine the monochrome landscapes as playgrounds in summer too.

The reality is that, [once the snow melts](#), they reveal a technicolour world of lush pastures littered with wildflowers and duck egg blue glacial lakes fed by burbling rivers. Warm but rarely hot, the mountains offer a welcome respite from the soaring temperatures of traditional beach holiday destinations. Instead, they inspire action-packed days spent hiking and biking, rather than [lazing on a sunbed](#).



Leogang, in Austria, boasts one of Europe's biggest and most famous bike parks | CREDIT: KLEMENS KOENIG

Where ski holidays often involve seeking out the maximum possible value of your (increasingly expensive) lift pass, summer trips to the mountains tend to be more diverse. Larger resorts sell guest cards at a fraction of the cost of a full lift pass, which provides access to public transport and the (restricted) lifts operating in peak summer months: plus free or discounted guided walking tours, outdoor yoga classes, e-bike rental, swimming pools and more. The lifts grant effortless access to trail running, high-altitude walking, and biking trails. The mountains are also littered with restaurants serving light Alpine fare laden with fresh vegetables from the fertile valleys below.

Summer travel to the mountains is far from new – curative Alpine holidays predate recreational skiing by centuries – yet the appeal is growing steadily in a world of healthy, adventurous travel. Furthermore, top European resorts are becoming increasingly crowded in winter, as limited periods of optimal ski conditions often coincide with peak



holiday weeks and inflated prices. When one Christmas week in a catered chalet can cost the same as three summer weeks in the same property, it makes a lot of financial sense to swap pistes for pastures.

Here's how some of Europe's top winter ski resorts transform in the warmer months – and how to visit them this summer.

## Engelberg, Switzerland

### Best for hiking



Around Engelberg, hikers can enjoy over 310 miles of trails | CREDIT: Silvano Zeiter

Set in the heart of [Switzerland](#) at the foot of the mighty Titlis mountain (3,239m), [Engelberg](#) offers winter visitors challenging skiing on two distinct ski areas, with keen powder hounds scooping a total 9,999m of vertical descent in a day by skiing all of “Engelberg’s Big 5” (Galtiberg, 1,960m; Steinberg, 1,275m; Laub, 1,194m; Steintäli, 576m; Sulz, 729m).

Come summer, freeriders are replaced by hikers enjoying over 310 miles of trails, which range from child-friendly nature strolls to the 28.5-mile Buiräbähnli Safari. The latter is a multi-day adventure that combines a circular hike from Engelberg, with overnight accommodation in rustic farmsteads, and rides on eight Buiräbähnli – local dialect for farmer’s cable cars. Traditionally used to transport farmers and their families from farms inaccessible by road, some of these cable cars date to the 1960s and are designated Swiss cultural assets.

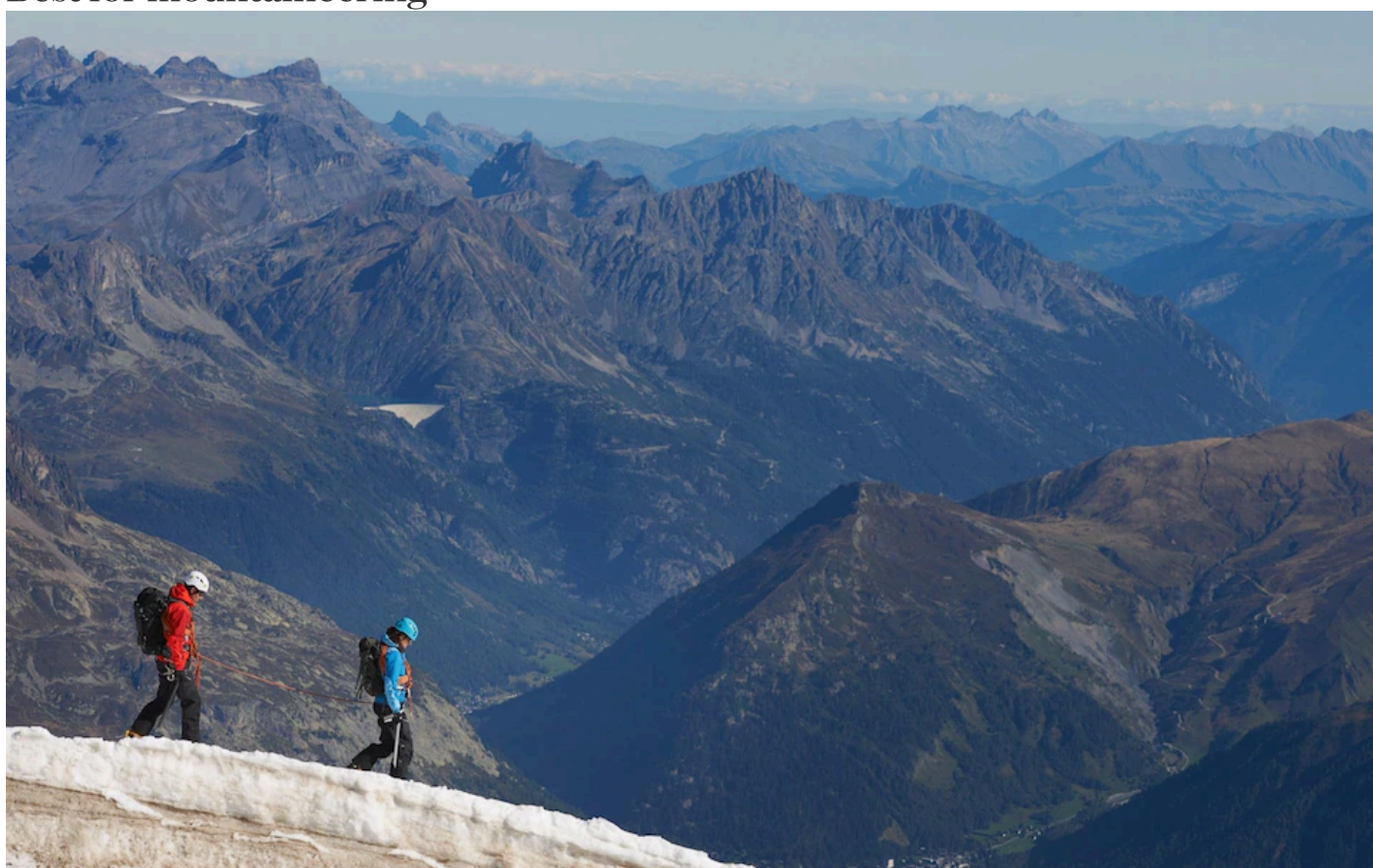
A far cry from the winter bustle of Engelberg's modern rotating Titlis cablecar, these vintage cable cars offer a rare glimpse into the tranquil pastoral world of Switzerland's high-Alpine farms.

**Summer secret:** Treat tired post-hike feet to an invigorating barefoot "tickle path" (Kitzelpfad) as you plunge them into the natural Kneipp-style trail in the scenic Härzli lake, at the top of the Brunni chairlift.

**What to book:** [Ski Lodge Engelberg](#) (0041 41 637 35 00) has double rooms from £155 per night, B&B. You can fly from London to Zürich with [SWISS](#) from £120 return, and [travel to Engelberg by train](#) in two hours.

## Chamonix, France

### Best for mountaineering



Chamonix tops the list for aspiring mountaineers come summer | CREDIT: alamy

Set at the foot of Mont Blanc (4,809m), [Chamonix](#) has been steeped in mountaineering history since the first ascent of the peak in 1786.

A winter bucket list destination for keen skiers, Chamonix tops the list for aspiring mountaineers in summer. Join the [Shackleton Challenges](#) expedition and training programme in a bid to summit Mont Blanc – the week-long course includes a comprehensive preparation programme as well as glacier skills training and guiding to the summit (from £7,745 per person, including six nights' full board and airport transfers).



For something gentler, [La Compagnie des Guides de Chamonix](#) (the world's oldest guiding outfit at 203 years old) offers a range of climbing courses ranging from one-day mountaineering skills courses to multi-day botanical hikes. Skiers who have tackled the infamous Vallée Blanche in winter can retrace their steps with guided walks across the glacier, pausing for lunch and panoramic views at the skiers' favourite refuge, Le Requin.

**Summer secret:** Follow in the footsteps of some of the world's greatest mountaineers and adventurers and spend a night at the foot of the Vallée Blanche in the historic [Refuge du Montenvers](#).

**What to book:** [Peak Retreats](#) (023 9283 9310) offers seven nights in a self-catered two-bedroom apartment in Le Cristal de Jade from £557 per person, based on four sharing, including a return DFDS ferry crossing.

## Whistler, Jasper and Banff, Canada

### Best for raw nature



Explore plunging fjords and dense forest at Jasper National Park | CREDIT: alamy

[Canada](#) is one of the planet's great natural realms, a geological mosaic of mountain peaks, glaciers, simmering volcanos, plunging fjords and dense forest. It's also a place of big-mountain ski legend: home to North America's largest lift-served ski area ([Whistler Blackcomb](#), BC); the birthplace of heliskiing, and home to some of the world's most scenic pistes in the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks (a Unesco World Heritage Site).

Each summer, the winter landscape transforms into a world of wildflowers, waterfalls, vivid blue lakes, roaming moose, elk, black and grizzly bears. Explore this raw beauty with Audley Travel's 16-day self-drive western Canada tour, which includes visits to Whistler, Jasper and Banff as well as guided wildlife tours and a scenic helicopter flight.

**Summer secret:** [Martha McCallum](#), an experienced mountain guide, biologist and yoga instructor, leads Heli-Hikes in the peaks above Banff. A scenic helicopter ride over the Rockies deposits you in the pristine Mt Charles Stewart alpine basin to enjoy a guided nature hike in untouched nature.

**What to book:** [Audley Travel](#) (01993 838700) offers a 16-day Jewels of Western Canada tour from £4,785 per person, based on two adults, including return flights, hire car, accommodation and excursions.

## Cervinia, Italy

### Best for summer skiing



The cross-border Matterhorn Alpine Crossing cable car links Zermatt with Cervinia | CREDIT: Zermatt Bergbahnen

Thanks to the cross-border Matterhorn Alpine Crossing cable car linking [Zermatt](#) and [Cervinia](#), the Matterhorn ski season now blends seamlessly from winter to summer.

Europe's largest and highest summer ski area, the Cervino Ski Paradise encompasses some 15 miles of pistes on the Plateau Rosà glacier (3,500m) above Zermatt, which remains open until early September. The quiet, sunny slopes are ideal for focusing on



piste skills with the expert instructors of the Warren Smith Ski Academy, which offers five-day summer courses that blend on and off-snow technique, biomechanics and physiology tuition. Available in July and August, the courses include full mornings of on-snow instruction, leaving afternoons free to enjoy Cervinia's extensive non-ski summer activities, including mountain biking, via ferrata, horse riding and Nordic walking.

**Summer secret:** Heliskiers love dropping into the blissfully remote Restaurant Alpage for lunch after untracked descents from the Swiss-Italian border. Happily, it opens in summer as well, serving its signature Aostan dishes and wines on a sun-drenched terrace overlooking the [Matterhorn](#).

**What to book:** The [Warren Smith Ski Academy](#) (07747809545) offers five-day ski courses from £518 per person, excluding lift passes. Book accommodation at [Hotel Mon Reve](#), which offers doubles from £102 per night, B&B. Fly to Milan Malpensa with [easyJet](#) from £66 return.

## Alpbach, Austria

### Best for families



Alpbach is home to the Lauser-Sauser summer toboggan

Widely recognised as one of the most family-friendly ski resorts in the Alps, Alpbach is equally popular in summer, when its traditional timber chalets and surrounding pastures are bestrewn with flowers. Skiers familiar with Alpbach's gently undulating slopes will vouch for the area's pastoral beauty, although few are likely to have witnessed the

summer spectacle of those pistes transformed into blankets of pink blossoming mountain azaleas.

Dedicated children's attractions include the extensive mountain-top Lauserland adventure playground and Lauser-Sauser summer toboggan; Juppi's Enchanted Forest, which is accessed from the Reitherkogelbahn gondola and offers buggy-friendly forest strolls, a petting zoo and enchanted village; and a weekly programme of family events, including herb foraging, raft building and visits to local beekeepers. All these attractions are free with the complementary Alpbachtal Card, which offers other activities like e-bike tours, lakeside yoga and torchlit village tours at reduced prices.

**Summer secret:** [Alpbach](#) has hosted the European Forum Alpbach (EFA), a global interdisciplinary platform for young people to debate science, politics, business and culture, since 1945. The fortnight-long forum (August 17 to 30, 2024) is open to all and features seminars and talks from Nobel Prize winners, foreign ministers and a appearance from Pope Francis.

**What to book:** [Inghams](#) (01483 319 637) offers seven nights' half board at the Böglerhof from £1,449 per person, based on a family of four sharing, including return flights and shared transfers.

## Verbier, Switzerland

### Best for culture



Verbier's summer activities include road and mountain biking, climbing and sky diving | CREDIT: SeeVerbier.com



A winter resort that has it all – big mountain skiing across four connected valleys, pumping nightlife, gourmet restaurants and ultra-luxe chalets – [Verbier](#) has just as much, if not more, to offer in summer.

The town's headline summer event is the [Verbier Festival](#), a classical music festival in its 31<sup>st</sup> year that brings global superstars such as Evgeny Kissin, Mischa Maisky, and Sir Simon Rattle to perform in large-scale and intimate venues (July 18 to 4 August 4 2024). While not enjoying world-class concerts, Verbier offers equally superlative activities from road and mountain biking, climbing and sky diving to cheese-making, artistic workshops and beekeeping. And yes, Chez Dany is open, with guests biking and walking to the legendary chalet for traditional Valais feasts. Rather than sledging down afterwards, they enjoy balmy sunset evenings by roaring firepits before taking a moonlit forest stroll back into Verbier.

**Summer secret:** The Valais is home to a network of historic irrigation channels known as “bisses”. The Bisse du Levron diverts water from the Chaux glacier and Raye des Verbierins river below the Mont Fort hut to the pastures, vineyards and orchards around Verbier, with a scenic walking trail following it from Les Ruinettes into town.

**What to book:** [Verbier Exclusive](#) (01608 674 011) offers seven nights' self-catered accommodation in the two-bedroom apartment Hickory from £5,000, including daily cleaning, 24-hour in-resort driving service, a welcome hamper and pre-arrival planning and in-resort concierge service.

## Alta Badia, Italy

### Best for a long weekend



Panicia: a barley soup that is a speciality of Alta Badia | CREDIT: Alex Moling

Skiing on the snow-dusted flanks of the Dolomites is a visual feast. While snow blankets the pastures, foothills and picturesque villages at the feet of the dramatic limestone peaks, their sheer needles pierce the sky and blush pink, lilac and apricot at dawn and dusk. Summer brings an even more vibrant colour palette, adding wildflower-dotted pastures and lush forests.

The beauty of the Dolomites is arguably best soaked up from a sunny terrace while indulging in delicious local cuisine, something [Alta Badia](#) excels at. The cluster of sophisticated villages boasts a constellation of Michelin-star restaurants yet the quality of cooking and produce is stellar across its cosy mountain huts and family-run restaurants. Spectacular scenery, exceptional cuisine and diverse activities, from via ferrata tours, whitewater rafting, wine tours and zip lining, now combine with direct flights Gatwick to Bolzano, placing the Dolomites within three hours' travel time of London.

**Summer secret:** Winter visitors to Alta Badia will be familiar with the Sella Ronda, a skiing circumnavigation of the Sella Massif. Come summer, it's possible to cycle around the scenic massif, with the local roads closed to motorised traffic on two dedicated Sellaronda Bike Days.

**What to book:** [Powder Byrne](#) (020 8246 5300) offers four nights' half board at Hotel Gran Paradiso, San Cassiano, from £1,367 per person, including transfers to/from Bolzano. You can fly twice weekly from London Gatwick to Bolzano with [SkyAlps](#) from £157 each way.



## Leogang, Austria

### Best for mountain biking



Epic Bike Park is home to the Speedster World Cup track, sprawling Riders Playground, a pro-jump line and a wealth of single trails for all abilities | CREDIT: KLEMENS KOENIG

Together with neighbouring [Saalbach](#) Hinterglemm and Fieberbrunn, Leogang makes up the expansive Skicircus area, encompassing 168 miles of pistes. While Saalbach steals the winter limelight for après-ski and Fieberbrunn for off-piste, Leogang takes centre stage once the snow melts.

A regular stop on the UCI Mountain Bike World Cup circuit since 2012, Leogang boasts one of Europe's biggest and most famous bike parks. The Epic Bike Park is home to the Speedster World Cup track, sprawling Riders Playground, a pro-jump line and a wealth of single trails for all abilities. Further to the bike park, there are jump lines, an airbag, drops and a vast pump track at the base of the Asitz gondola as well as over 55 miles of trails spread across the shared

**Summer secret:** Two farming families in Leogang have revived the ancient tradition of cultivating organic saffron in the valley. The “red gold” can be bought at the local Zieferhof farm shop and sampled in some of the town's restaurants.

**What to book:** [Forsthofgut](#) (0043 6583 8561) offers Escape from Everyday Life four-night packages from £1,029 per person, including half board, a 40-minute waldDUFT massage

and a €50 spa voucher. You can fly twice weekly from London to Salzburg with [easyJet](#) from £110 return.

## Lech, Austria

### Best for trail running



Lech is a popular hub for trail running, with over 30 miles of dedicated trails | CREDIT: danielzangerl

Long recognised as one of the world's most exclusive winter resorts, [Lech](#) attracts well-heeled yet committed skiers seeking discrete luxury accommodation and access to Austria's largest and best-known resort, Ski Arlberg. Come summer, the focus shifts from skiing to a holistic approach to health and wellness, with e-biking, hiking and outdoor yoga amongst the wildflowers.

The genteel, geranium-festooned town is also a popular hub for trail running, with over 30 miles of dedicated trails. Whether you race up and down rocky mountain trails or jog through meadows and mossy forest paths, running on natural surfaces builds fitness and strength, with the added health benefits of running at altitude. Add a spot of natural Kneipp therapy by dipping your feet in the mineral-rich waters of the Lech River or take the plunge in the riverside Forest Swimming Pool. It's possible to reach neighbouring St Anton from Lech on foot (approx 6.5 hours walking time), with assistance from three lifts that many skiers will be familiar with – the Rüfikopf, Vallugabahn I and Galzigbahn cable cars.



**Summer secret:** Experienced herbalist Veronika Walch hails from one of the oldest families in Lech and is intimately familiar with the flowers and herbs of her local mountains. Take a [guided foraging hike](#) with Walch to share in her wisdom and passion for natural healing and cooking.

**What to book:** [Bramble Ski](#) (020 3650 3174) offers a week in the self-catered three-bedroom Brunnenhof 12 apartment from £4,602 for six adults, including concierge service, bathrobes, slippers and toiletries. You can fly from London to Innsbruck with [easyJet](#) from £103 return.

## Baqueira Beret, Spain

### Best for water sports



This summer two chairlifts will open access to new biking and hiking trails around Baqueira Beret | CREDIT: alamy

The Aran Valley, perched in the Catalan Pyrenees on the border of France and Spain, is a rugged place of lakes, rivers, bears and eagles. The 35-mile-long valley is dotted with 33 sleepy villages that lead up to the ski resort of Baqueira Beret: the launchpad for expansive skiing across five distinct mountains.

Summer tourism remains nascent, yet two chairlifts will run this season, opening access to new biking and hiking trails and the high-altitude El Pla de Beret plateau, the source of the Garonne and Noguera Pallaresa rivers. In addition to boasting two major rivers for whitewater rafting, the Val d'Aran offers multiple opportunities for canyoning and kayaking, and paddleboarding on the fjord-like Ainsa reservoirs.

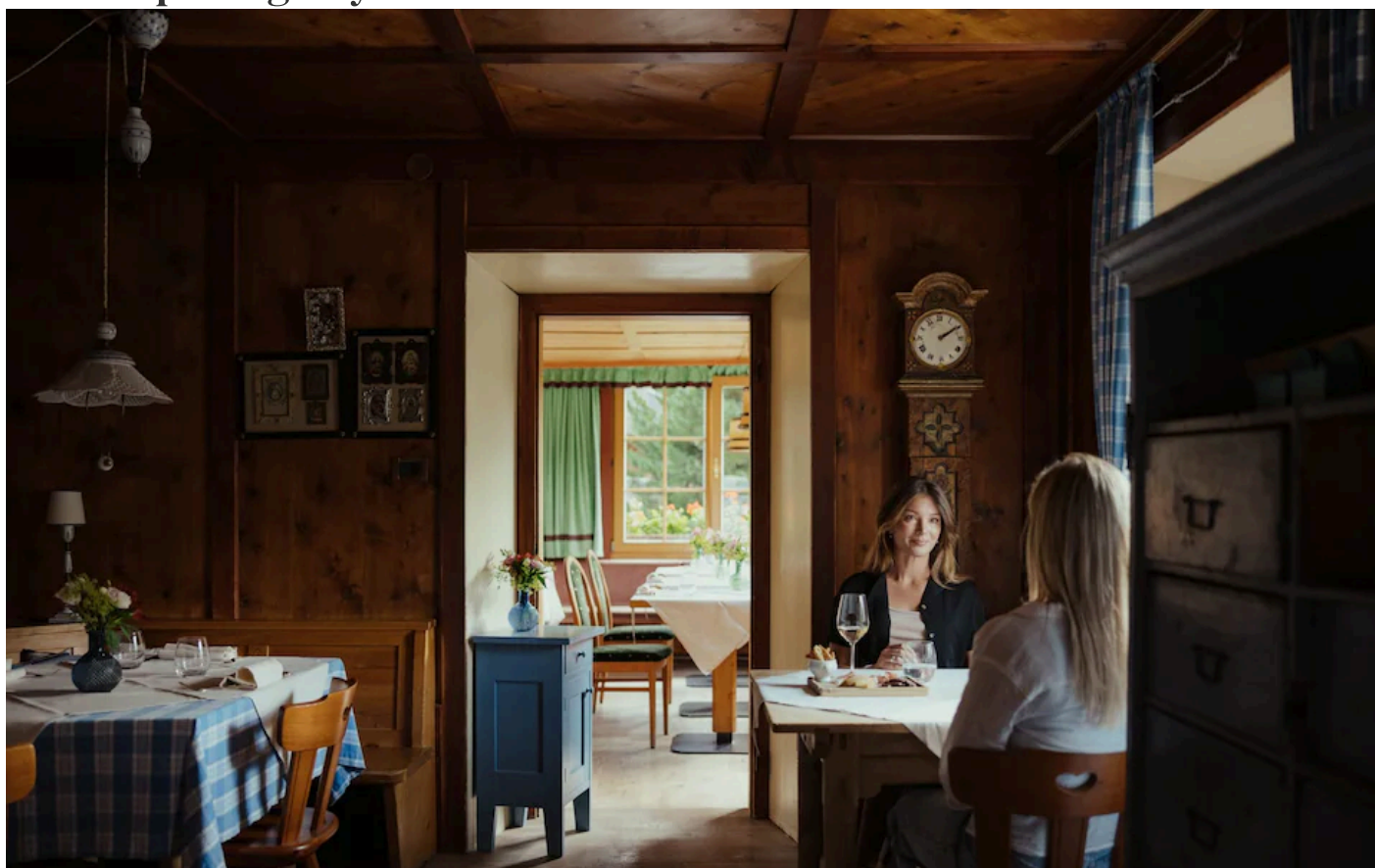
**Summer secret:** Enjoy a spot of Mediterranean beach club style in the mountains with sunny afternoons spent listening to live music on the terrace of [Fandango Baqueira](#), the Alpine outpost of the legendary Formentera venue.

**What to book:** [Eira](#) Ski Lodge has doubles from £111 per night, B&B, or from £852 per night, B&B, for exclusive use of its lodge, which has eight double bedrooms (0034 973 645 112). You can fly from London to Toulouse with [easyJet](#) from £60 return.

*For more inspiration on visiting the [Alps in summer](#), see our guide.*

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## Five surprising ways ski resorts are different in summer



Many of the most popular après-ski bars open in summer, with a more relaxed vibe | CREDIT: Alex Moling

### 1. Lift changes

Most large resorts operate a restricted number of cablecars, gondolas and chairlifts from June or July to September. Lifts are often modified to carry bikes and some resorts offer mountain bike-specific passes.

### 2. All-inclusive passes

Resorts generally sell guest cards rather than dedicated lift passes. Often available free or at a nominal charge to guests booked into accredited local accommodation, these passes usually include access to lifts, public transport, public pools, sports centres and attractions.



### 3. New timetables

If you plan to ski, prepare yourself for lapping a limited number of lifts (even Europe's largest summer ski area only has 10) and calling it a day after lunch, when the sun reduces the snow to slush.

### 4. Relaxed après

While many of the most popular après-ski bars open in summer, expect a more relaxed vibe with a lot less tabletop dancing.

### 5. Chalet savings

Outside of peak Christmas and Easter holiday weeks, there's generally no significant difference in the costs of travel, accommodation and in-resort dining in winter and summer. However, you can save big on chalet accommodation. As Tom Avery, founder of [Verbier Exclusive](#), explains: "Our guests typically dine out more in summer than they do in winter, so we offer our larger chalets fully serviced with food and drinks charged at cost." This means you can snap up the seven-bedroom serviced Chalet Nyumba from £25,000 in summer, compared with £36,300 (rising to £121,000) in winter.

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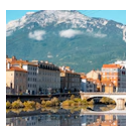
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