

[News](#) [Sport](#) [Money](#) [Business](#) [Opinion](#) [Israel](#) [Ukraine](#) [Royals](#) [Life](#) [Style](#) [Travel](#)[See all Travel](#)

Why more skiers are driving to the Alps – and how to do it

With more skiers getting behind the wheel, we share the best resorts and top tips for hitting the road this season

By Dave Watts

11 November 2023 • 5:00pm



Driving has long been a great way of getting to the mountains. Travelling by car avoids all the hassle of airports, baggage allowances and tiresome transfers at the start and end of your ski holiday – and with the ski season approaching, the number of British skiers hitting the road looks set to boom.

Recent research by the Ski Club of Great Britain showed that 28 per cent of people intend to drive to the slopes this winter, compared with just 16 per cent in 2019. It's easy to see why.

"Self-drive ski holidays represent excellent value. They also give skiers more flexibility. Guests can bring skis, boots and as much luggage as they want without paying the airlines' sky-high extra charges," said Alison Willis, from tour operator Peak Retreats.

It's not just the journey that appeals. In many resorts, having a car is handy for visiting nearby ski areas, to extend your trip and to help ease the stresses once you arrive. "Fifty per cent of our clients take self-drive packages and lots of them stop on the way down and back to get seven or eight days skiing in," said Jane Bolton of Erna Low. "Those renting apartments also shop in cheaper supermarkets in the valley to avoid paying high prices for food and wine in resort."



I couldn't agree more. A group of three friends and I have driven to the Alps regularly for holidays. Over the years we've cracked the code to the perfect escape. We book a week in a smart apartment – which are increasingly comfortable and spacious – and, rather than joining the weekend traffic, set off early on a Thursday. En route, we stay in a valley town with its own ski area at a bargain price for two nights, ski there on Friday and move on early Saturday morning to our resort for the week.

We repeat the tactic on our return, departing Saturday morning and stopping at a different resort, gaining an extra afternoon on the slopes and an easy drive home on Sunday. Our itinerary often includes many of the resorts listed below – either as the main base or as a stopover. We've had great days skiing in La Clusaz and Courmayeur on the way to or from bigger resorts such as Val d'Isère and Courchevel in the Tarentaise. That's the joy of driving to the Alps: you're in control of your own schedule, with the choice to ski or stop, as much or as little as you want.

Driving can also work out much cheaper than flying, especially if you are taking your own equipment and splitting the cost between a group. It's a great way of travelling for families too, who don't need to worry about cramming kids' gear into their luggage allowances.

Here's everything you need to know.

Skip ahead:

[France](#)

[Austria](#)

[Switzerland](#)

[Italy](#)

France

La Clusaz

Best for charm

Set above Lake Annecy, this is one of the most charming ski resorts in France – a genuine old mountain village that exudes rustic beauty and Gallic atmosphere.

The slopes suit intermediates best, but there's a fabulous high beginner area set among the extensive cross-country trails. There are few black runs but the real attraction for expert skiers is the extensive off-piste. Le Grand-Bornand is a 10-minute drive away and offers more great intermediate slopes.

If you stay centrally, you'll find plenty of entertainment for the whole family – there's a cinema, bowling alley and free ski lifts for children. There's no shortage of bars and après-ski options too – but it's not the place for those who want wild nightlife.

Drive time: Eight hours

Book it: From £1,280 with Erna Low (020 3011 1222; ernalow.co.uk) at the four-star Residence Mendi Alde



The family-friendly ski village of Les Gets can be reached by car in roughly eight hours

Les Gets

Best for families

Despite being part of one of the world's biggest ski areas, this attractive, small, family-friendly village has retained its French identity. This is partly because of the smart food and wine shops lining the main street and a central open-air ice rink – which is just one of many off-the-pistes activities.

The resort shares its local slopes with its neighbour Morzine and has a separate small ski area of its own. Although the main attraction for good intermediate skiers is the connection to the huge Portes du Soleil circuit – a car is handy for quick access to it via the gondola at Ardent (rather than going the long way round on skis via Morzine).

Beginners have two nursery areas and very easy slopes to progress to. Experts can try several steep black runs and there's some great off-piste to explore with a guide.

Drive time: Eight hours

Book it: From £1,332 with Peak Retreats (023 9283 9310; peakretreats.co.uk) at Les Fermes Emiguy residence

Chamonix

Best for experts

This ancient year-round tourist town spreads for miles along a narrow valley surrounded by towering peaks, including several glaciers and the mighty Mont Blanc – the highest mountain in Western Europe.

The centre is full of atmosphere, with cobbled streets and squares, beautiful old buildings, a fast-running river and pavement cafés. As you'd expect in a world-class resort, there's no shortage of lively après ski, good restaurants and smart hotels and apartments.

There are four separate ski areas and a car is handy to drive to the outlying ones. Most suit experts best. There are plenty of steep pistes, but it's the phenomenal off-piste that attracts a cult following here. Intermediates will enjoy the distant Balme and Les Houches areas most.

Drive time: Eight hours

Book it: From £1,197 with Erna Low (020 3011 1222; ernalow.co.uk) in a two-bedroom self-catering apartment in the four-star Residence La Ginabelle



The picturesque French Alps are worth the long drive from the UK

Bourg-St-Maurice

Best for value

Not a resort but a valley town, which is a great base (and great value) for keen skiers with a car who want to try a few different major resorts during a one-week stay.

A funicular from Bourg takes you right into the Les Arcs ski area, which is linked by a double-decker cable car to La Plagne. Just a short drive away are Val d'Isère, Tignes, Ste Foy and La Rosière (linked to La Thuile in Italy). All are great resort options for strong intermediate and expert skiers. You'll have to buy day passes to explore each one but you'll save the extra cost over buying a week's pass for one area by the lower prices in Bourg, compared with high-altitude resorts.

If you're travelling on a budget, there are some good-value unpretentious restaurants and lots of everyday shops, including supermarkets selling produce at valley prices.

Drive time: Nine hours

Book it: From £1,760 with Ski Collection (023 9283 9310; skicollection.co.uk) at the four-star Coeur d'Or residence

Les Carroz

Best for peace and quiet

This traditional mountain village is on the road up to purpose-built Flaine and has expanded its appeal in recent years. They both share the huge Grand Massif ski area with Samöens. It has a peaceful atmosphere and is a pleasant place to stroll around.

The ski area is excellent for intermediates, who will enjoy the long, varied pistes, and for experts, who can try several steep back runs and extensive off-piste. Beginners are well catered for with quiet nursery slopes at the village level and easy slopes at the top of the gondola.

Of the half a dozen hotels, the best is the small four-star Servages d'Armelle up the hill out of town next to the slopes. Lots of apartments are available too.

Drive time: Eight hours

Book it: From £1,900 with Ski Solutions (020 3918 2496; skisolutions.com) at the four-star Residence Les Chalets de Leana near the resort centre

Megève

Best for cruising with views

This traditional resort has a charming medieval, cobbled centre that is populated by horse-drawn sleighs and a fine church. Lots of smart clothing, jewellery and antique shops plus art galleries add to the chic atmosphere. There's no shortage of luxurious four- and five-star hotels and Michelin-starred restaurants to splash the cash in

The extensive slopes are ideal for easy-going intermediate cruising among glorious scenery – including stunning views of Mont Blanc. Mountain restaurants are plentiful and offer quality food and service – with options for all budgets.

The main attraction for experts is the off-piste, which tends not to get tracked as quickly as in more macho resorts. And there are several beginner areas and very easy green runs to progress to.

Drive time: Eight hours

Book it: From £700 per person, excluding Le Shuttle crossings, chalet board in Chalet Hotel Sylvana with Stanford Skiing (01603 477471; stanfordskiing.co.uk), based on two sharing.

[Back to index](#)



Driving to St Anton will take around 11 hours

Austria

St Anton

Best for snow

The nearest major Austrian resort reachable by road is a safer bet for those keen to explore the popular Arlberg ski area than nearby Lech, which can be cut off by heavy snowfalls that close the Flexen Pass access road.

The centre of St Anton is a traffic-free main street lined by traditional-style buildings, which give the resort a wealth of character. There are dozens of hotels, plus some fairly luxurious catered chalet options. The resort's après ski is legendary, with many places buzzing with loud music and dancing as the slopes close, both on the mountain and in the village – with the latter carrying on until the early hours.

The skiing around St Anton is steep and suits confident intermediates and experts best. The off-piste possibilities are phenomenal.

Drive time: 11 hours

Book it: From £615 per person, B&B, three-star Haus Kindl with STC Ski (01730 812611; stcski.com) based on two people sharing

[Back to index](#)



A nine-hour drive is needed to get to the chalet-style resort of Verbier | CREDIT: Moment RF/Getty

Switzerland

Verbier

Best for lively luxury

This big, chalet-style resort has a reputation for attracting royals and the jet set. The town is set on a high, sunny plateau, facing spectacular peaks and appeals to a much younger clientele than most other major Swiss destinations.

The slopes are mainly steep and suit experts best – with lots of on- and off-piste challenges, including ungroomed itineraries, which build up huge moguls. But intermediates can enjoy the slopes too – especially the Savoleyres area.

Accommodation is pricey and hotels range from three to five stars. There are plenty of luxury chalets and more modest apartments too. Après ski is one of Verbier's biggest attractions, from the infamous Farm Club to a host of other lively bars and clubs.

Drive time: Nine hours

Book it: From £870 per person, B&B, at Hotel Mirabeau, with Mountain Beds (01502 471960; mountainbeds.com), based on two sharing, excluding travel

[Back to index](#)

Italy

Courmayeur

Best for foodies

The nearest Italian resort for drivers – from France, you pass through the Mont Blanc tunnel and pop out right by the Courmayeur ski area. The village has a charming traffic-free centre of cobbled streets and ancient buildings and is popular with well-heeled weekenders from Milan and Turin.

The relatively small area of pistes suits good intermediates best and has fabulous views of Mont Blanc. For experts, there is phenomenal off-piste to be explored with a guide. Having a car is handy for visiting other nearby resorts such as La Thuile and Pila.

A real highlight is the excellent restaurants, both on the mountain and in the village. Après ski is mainly based around stylish bars – featuring comfy sofas and armchairs – which serve free canapés in the early evening.

Drive time: 10 hours

Book it: From £698 per person, B&B, at three-star Bouton d'Or with Momentum Ski (020 7371 9111; momentumski.com) based on two sharing



Enjoy the slopes of Courmayeur after a 10-hour drive | CREDIT: Lorenzo Belfrond

Champoluc

Best for crowd-free slopes

Just a few miles past Courmayeur, if you turn off the motorway and head up the steep and winding road to Champoluc you'll find a relaxed and unspoiled mountain village.

The skiing spans three valleys (the Monterosa ski area) and the pistes suit intermediates best, with plenty of easy cruising and steeper red runs. It's also excellent for off-piste adventures with guides, including heli-skiing to Zermatt in Switzerland and back.

And Champoluc offers a splendid choice of hotels – whether on the mountain or in the valley.

Drive time: 11 hours

Book it: From £1,260 per person, half board, at three-star Hotel Bellevue excluding LeShuttle, with Ski Champoluc (01572 842130; ski-champoluc.com), based on two sharing. Prices include lift pass, snack lunches at selected mountain restaurants, ski locker, in-resort transfers and basic medical and liability insurance

[Back to index](#)

All you need to know about driving to the Alps

How do flying and driving costs compare?

At the time of writing, return flights with easyJet from Gatwick to Geneva, departing in January, cost from £125 for a standard fare. On top of the basic cost, there are also additional, necessary extras. To take a 23kg hold bag, a decent-sized cabin bag, skis and boots came to another £201. A grand total of £326 per person. That's over £1,300 for four people to travel and excludes the cost of getting to the airport, transfers to your resort and accommodation.

By comparison, the cheapest self-drive package for four people, including an apartment for a week, plus Le Shuttle fares, was £1,197 (£300 per person). You'll need to add on the cost of motorway tolls (roughly £150 return to many French resorts and fuel costs – £170). Getting through the Mont Blanc tunnel to the Italian resorts will cost around £55 return. Despite the extras, with accommodation included, self-drive packages come up trumps.

How long does it take?

You can get to lots of French resorts in around eight or nine hours of driving from Calais – mainly on toll motorways. You'll need to add on time for meal or rest breaks, filling up with fuel and potential traffic. But it's still easy to do the trip in a day from London. Be warned, Saturday traffic can be heavy with long queues on approach roads. Set off early to avoid queues, or try to book accommodation Sunday to Sunday. Accessing Italian, Swiss and Austrian resorts takes longer.



Driving instead of flying enables to you to pack a lot more luggage for less cost | CREDIT: Getty

What should you do in bad weather?

To prepare your vehicle for winter conditions, make sure your car has been serviced, the coolant is topped up with anti-freeze and you have low-temperature windscreen washer fluid. Pack your car with the essentials, plus snacks and water in case of any unexpected delays. Check for live updates of road closures and weather conditions en route. It is wise to take out European breakdown cover in case of an emergency and to check if your travel insurance will cover any extra accommodation if you cannot reach your final destination on time.

Should you take Le Shuttle or a ferry?

Le Shuttle (the new name for Eurotunnel) is quicker and less hassle than travelling by ferry. It's quite pricey if you book directly, but many tour operators have negotiated great deals and include Flexiplus tickets in their prices (worth from £269 each way). Flexiplus allows you to travel at any time on the day of your booking (not just the crossing you're booked on), priority boarding (so you're first on and first off) and entry to an executive lounge with complimentary refreshments.

Ferries from Dover to Calais take longer than Le Shuttle and cost roughly the same. If you live in the north of England or Scotland you may prefer an alternative route, such as the overnight sailing from Hull to Rotterdam.



Le Shuttle might be more expensive than the ferry but it's quicker and less hassle

How do I access tolls?

Assuming you're using the French motorways, the easiest way to pay the tolls is by getting a Sanef liber-t toll tag ([sanef.com/en](https://www.sanef.com/en)) that attaches to your windscreen. The tag allows you

to go through the electronic payment lane, with your account when charged automatically – avoiding the need to have cash or cards to hand. It works for Italian motorways too.

To use Swiss or Austrian motorways you need to buy a vignette. These are available online at switzerlandtravelcentre.com/en/gbr/offer/vignette and asfinag.at respectively, or locally when you arrive at the border.

What do you need in/on the car?

You need to take the driving licence for every driver, proof of insurance (you may need to extend your regular policy to cover driving in Europe), the vehicle log book, reflective jackets, a warning triangle, a spare bulb kit, a first aid kit and snow chains – the latter are legally required when signs say so; practice putting them on and taking them off in the UK before travelling. You also need to put on the car a UK sticker and headlamp beam deflectors.

Where can I park?

Check with the tour operator, hotel or apartment provider that you are booking with for the best parking arrangements.

Can I drive my electric car to the Alps?

Yes. French motorway service stations are well-provided with electric charging points. You can use an app such as plugshare.com to locate charging points en-route and your tour operator or accommodation provider should be able to advise on local facilities.

Have you driven to the Alps? Please share your experiences in the comments below

Dispatches Newsletter

Let our foreign correspondents bring you the stories that matter - from Ukraine and around the world



Sign up

Related Topics

French Alps, France, Italy, Austria, Europe, Switzerland



The Telegraph values your comments but kindly requests all posts are on topic, constructive and respectful. Please review our [commenting policy](#).