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Why you should book your ski holiday now – and five insider tips to save money

From navigating the weather to rising costs and finding a resort without crowds, here’s everything you need to know

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Feel that? It’s the seasons changing. The kids are settled back at school, the nights are drawing in and it’s time for you to start planning your escape to the slopes.

Savvy skiers and snowboarders can gain a lot from forward thinking and, with just two months left until destinations start to lift their shutters, operators are reporting an

“unprecedented number of early bookings.”

“At the beginning of September we are already more than two-thirds full for the forthcoming season and more than 80 per cent sold on most high-season dates,” said Andy Sturt, owner of VIP Ski. “That’s pretty amazing by historical standards.”

A big driver of early booking is the availability of flights. But alarm bells are already ringing about increasing prices. “It’s difficult to choose just one reason to book your ski holiday early, but the price of flights could have the biggest impact,” warns Angus Kinloch from SkiLine. At the time of writing, a search for return easyJet flights from Gatwick to Geneva during February half term delivered prices up to £1,198 per person, excluding baggage.

Those flying from regional airports could be stung too. “Tour operators always adjust flight supplements, especially on peak dates. Traditionally this might be an additional £39 per person from Birmingham or £100 for Scottish airports,” said Kinloch – the former now sees a supplement of £449 for a February half-term flight. Skiers are also beginning to book rail tickets, following news that the ski train is back, albeit under another new guise.

Chalets continue to be a hot topic of conversation – and far fewer packages now offer the traditional elements Britons know and love (breakfast, dinner and afternoon tea, a chalet host, flights and transfers). Demand therefore continues to outstrip supply. “Chalets are more niche than ever – and their popularity, new regulations and additional costs have pushed up prices,” says Nick Morgan, director of specialists Le Ski. “We already have 60 per cent of our programme sold for this winter.”

Even those for whom money is no object can benefit from getting out the gates early. “With every luxury chalet property being totally unique, when it’s gone, it’s gone. Being first matters, and clients who embrace this sense of urgency will reap the rewards,” said Rupert Longsdon, from the Oxford Ski Company

And, if you really want to get ahead, Crystal Ski Holidays has already launched its packages for the 2024/25 season – the earliest many experts have seen.

Now, with a refreshed sense of urgency, is the time to plan your winter – here are the tricks to make sure you’re ahead of the crowd and the mistakes to avoid along the way.

1. Watch the weather

All eyes continue to be on changing weather patterns and what it means for the future of skiing. “Altitude is everything,” said Sturt from VIP Ski, who now only offers breaks in snow-sure resorts above 1,800m.

When it comes to ensuring pistes are open, “resorts have got much more creative,” explains snow reporter Patrick Thorne. “They pile it [snow] up when it’s cold, push it down

the mountain when it's too warm down low, even stockpile it under cover from the previous season. The resulting white ribbons on green and brown valley sides aren't the most attractive, but we can keep skiing." If low temperatures allow, advances in snowmaking offer insurance for both early- and late-season trips.

If in doubt over Europe, opt for a powder haven like Japan's northern island of Hokkaido or the snow-sure resorts of Scandinavia and British Columbia in Canada, which benefit from different weather patterns.

2. Discover a new resort

Lightning-quick lifts are making less-frequented villages clever bases for some brilliant ski resorts. In the heart of the Maurienne Valley, it's a 15-minute ride from Orelle to the Cime Caron (2,300m), a jumping-off point into the world's biggest lift-linked ski area, Les 3 Vallées. This summer the new Matterhorn Alpine Crossing has opened a faster link between the Swiss resort of Zermatt with its more affordable Italian neighbour Cervinia – via a 1.6km (about a mile) mast-free stretch skimming above Theodul Glacier in a scant four minutes. For easy access and a quiet retreat from Verbier, consider a base in Le Châble: its lift station is the first train-gondola link in Switzerland, providing cable-car connection from dawn until midnight.



Make the most of new lift networks to save money by staying in less-crowded resorts, like Cervinia – Zermatt's cheaper neighbour

Or opt for an underrated corner completely devoid of crowds, advises Babsi Lapwood, from the Mountain Trade Network: "A top tip when booking a ski holiday is to be more

flexible with destinations and look at alternative resorts, especially for families where prices are not affected by UK holidays.” Beyond the big names of the Alps it’s possible to uncover unique appeal, whether it be budget-friendly prices in Andorra, gourmet food in Norway or impressively reliable snow cover in Sweden.

Such is the demand for off-the-beaten-track skiing, Crystal Ski Holidays has launched another season of trips to Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Dinaric Alps, just south of the country’s capital city Sarajevo.

3. Don’t delay – especially if you want a chalet, US trip or to ski with the kids

If you’re certain that you want to ski in 2024, it has never been more important to lock your price as soon as possible, choosing a bonded operator that provides the security we’ve come to appreciate. It is especially important if you’re passionate about when and where you want to travel – and imperative if you want to stay in a chalet.

According to Seasonal Businesses in Travel there’s been a 56 per cent reduction in catered chalets across Europe since Brexit. “We are 27 per cent up and availability is getting tight,” said Dan Fox, from short-break specialists SkiWeekends and Flexiski. “If you have a group or want a whole chalet, don’t wait or you will be disappointed this winter.”

The same goes for trips to Canada and the USA, where prices on lift passes skyrocket as the season approaches and long-haul flights creep up in cost – autumn is often when operators offer enticing discounts for skiing across the pond.



Skiers hoping to visit America next winter should book early | CREDIT: Eric Seymour/Jackson Hole

And don't forget to look at the school calendar in advance. "The main UK holiday dates clash with Paris next season, and this hasn't happened for a few years," explains Kinloch. "At Easter, when prices are typically lower than half term, demand is already up 43 per cent compared to 2023."

The demand extends beyond just flights and accommodation too. Sarah Fox from Flexiski told The Telegraph: "We have just found out that the British ski school in Avoriaz has now sold out of mid-week lessons during February half term – already school holiday bookers needing lessons are too late."

4. Reconsider self-catering – or all-inclusive

There's no need to stress over crowded restaurants – or cooking – when you check into the new style of self-catering apartments – sleek and, compared to the old shoeboxes, positively supersized.

Rather than cooking, many families now tuck into a multi-course dinners from the likes of Huski, purveyors of freshly cooked food and ready to pop in the oven after a day on the slopes. For modern DIY luxury, Consensio's apartments come with housekeeping, on-call concierge, mid-week towel change, lift pass and ski-hire delivery, and Perrier Jouet on ice. Peak Retreats continues to develop a range of high-end self-catered properties, which includes ski-in/ski-out chalets and luxury apartments with spa facilities, all packaged with budget-friendly self-drive or rail travel options.

But this doesn't mean you have much time to spare. "There is an increasing shortage of beds available in the French Alps for holiday rental," said Cathy Rankin, sales director, at Pierre & Vacances. "This is a result of many leaseback owners having reached the end of their mortgage and no longer renting their property for season-long tourism." Post-pandemic delays on new developments are also squeezing supply.

If you don't fancy cooking at all, it might be time to reconsider going all-inclusive. "For skiers watching their budget, the biggest trend in booking continues to be the rise of all-inclusive ski holidays," said Richard Sincalir, from sno.co.uk. "The best offers are the hotels with full board, free bar and lift pass included."

All-inclusive leader Club Med will open another round of new properties on the slopes this season, including in Japan, to cater for this changing taste. At the other end of the price spectrum is Action Outdoors, which runs packages including meals, accommodation, equipment, lessons and lift passes, for those on tighter budgets.

The new ski trends to follow on your next holiday

Don't rush out to buy the latest kit

Are you buying a whole chalet to use one week a year? Likely not. The same principle can be applied to your ski kit. An increasing number of companies like [Ecoski](#) hire quality skiwear and even avalanche airbags and deliver items straight to your UK address, at a fraction of the cost to buy: an adult's jacket and pants for £8 a day, a preschooler onesie for £3.58.

"If you don't ski more than once or twice in a year, or have a growing family as we do, renting ski kit makes so much sense," says Ecoski ambassador and ex-Winter Olympian Chemmy Alcott. "Afterwards, you send it back before even washing it. You don't have the hassle of storing it to find the kids have outgrown it next year."

Plump for some private perks

The days of standing ice-lolly still in giant group ski lessons are dead. Make up for lost time with a bespoke private instructor. [Maison Sport](#) lets you review and choose from 1,200 independent instructors across some 350 European resorts. "Our site is unique in that you can really customise your experience, speaking directly with the instructor before you arrive," says Nick Robinson, Maison Sport co-founder. The platform has also acquired Supreme Ski School, which operates across 18 resorts in France and Switzerland, providing Maison Sport customers with even greater choice.

Returning to school can also make your holiday more enjoyable. "Book a couple of hours with a ski instructor, even if you have been skiing for years – after almost 12 months' break, the additional skill this will give you will make your holiday more enjoyable," advises Mark Nathan from Chalets1066 in Les Gets.

Adjust your après attitude

The pleasures of après-ski needn't always be at the bottom of a beer glass. The new-found love of self-care is contributing to the fast-growing trend of wellness tourism. How about a rejuvenating massage, a soul-soothing forest bath, or muscle-bending yoga session in the snow? Answering the call last season was the giant [new Silvretta Spa in Ischgl](#), which features multiple pools, saunas and treatments, plus an ice-skating rink. This season resorts continue to call on skiers to try the vast range of non-ski activities on offer off the slopes – a twilight tree-top adventure course in Val d'Isere, bobsleigh in La Plagne and tranquil snowshoeing in the Austrian wilderness.

Try the fastest-growing style of skiing

Touring or randonnée, skinning or uphill skiing: whatever the moniker, its popularity continues to skyrocket. Major resorts from Kitzbühel to Courchevel have built dedicated up-routes ideal for a scenic workout – with no need for a guide (it is always advised to have a qualified guide if venturing off-piste). [Val Thorens](#) opened its first dedicated ski touring zone last season, La Camille: a groomed ascent and two descents, one of which is ungroomed. When you're ready for the backcountry, try an introductory course to learn the basics in off-piste safety.

For the backcountry try an introductory course to learn the basics in off-piste safety –

[Zermatters Ski School](#) offers a five-hour guided taster experience for £229pp, including equipment hire.

Make it a multi-trip winter

Multi-resort lift passes are a staple of skiing across the pond and it's a trend that's picking up momentum on the continent. There's money to be saved flashing your [Epic Pass](#) around the world – in Europe alone, the Epic Pass gives lift access at five areas – five days at Verbier 4 Vallées in Switzerland, seven days at Les 3 Vallées in France, seven days at Skirama Dolomiti in Italy, three days at Ski Arlberg in Austria, plus 20 per cent discounts on food, lodging and lessons. Last winter saw the addition of [Andermatt](#), Switzerland, to the pass – where holders now have unlimited access to the slopes and ongoing investment is transforming the resort (this winter sees new itinerary routes open).

Epic's rival, [Ikon](#), has also branched further into Europe with the addition of Kitzbühel, Austria, to its offering. Pass holders can now access the slopes of Chamonix Mont Blanc in France, the Dolomiti Superski area in Italy, the Grandvalira in Andorra and Zermatt in Switzerland – each for seven days across the season. Passes went on sale for this season back in spring (the value lies in using the pass to its full ability) – as winter approaches prices and availability only increase, so it pays to secure yours early.

Leslie Woit



5. Travel by rail instead of air

Following a recent announcement from Eurostar, British skiers now have the opportunity to travel to resorts in France on a service which will run via Lille, with a simple change. Unlike previously, tickets are bookable independently or through package operators like TravelSki and Inghams. The latter, as part of a wider commitment to halve its carbon emissions by 2030, has also launched rail packages to resorts in Italy, Austria and Switzerland.

Rail passengers opting for an indirect route to the Alps can now also benefit from special discounts in resorts – [Montagne Verte](#), a non-profit association founded and funded by the community of [Morzine](#), rewards those with proof of purchase of a train ticket with discounts on lift passes, accommodation and eating out. Operators such as AliKats are also offering incentives, including accommodation discounts, for those travelling by train.

What are your top tips when planning and booking a ski holiday? Please share your experiences in the comments section below.

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