Ski holidays are becoming an unaffordable luxury, but there are solutions

Hitting the pistes has never been cheap, but prices on the slopes are threatening to break the budgets of thousands of British skiers

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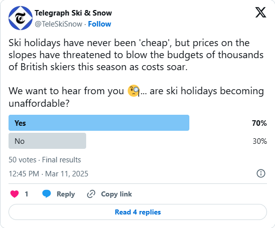
Prices in once budget-friendly ski resorts have risen in recent years, forcing skiers to reconsider their choice of holiday Credit: alamy

Skiers will always ski, but in recent years an annual ski trip has become less and less affordable. The cost of living has risen sharply since the pandemic, with prices increasing in the UK by three per cent in the 12 months to January 2025 — and it's a similar picture around the world, with little let up in sight thanks to continuing global instability.

There are around 1.8 million skiers in the UK and research from the Mountain Trade Network (MTN) in October 2024 showed that 47 per cent of those had no plans to ski this winter (2024/25) due to cost, up from 40 per cent last season. A flash poll by *Telegraph Ski* found that 70 per cent of readers think ski holidays are becoming unaffordable.



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Ski holidays have never been 'cheap', but prices on the slopes have threatened to blow the budgets of thousands of British skiers this season as costs soar.

We want to hear from you 🧐... are ski holidays becoming unaffordable?

Yes	**70%**
No	30%

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During my own research over the past four years, I've not seen the same deals or prices that were advertised a decade ago. Back then, I could regularly source all-inclusive packages for a week's ski holiday in a popular French resort for around £500 per person – now such low prices are only achievable in budget or off-the-beaten-track locations.

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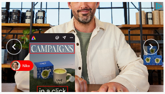

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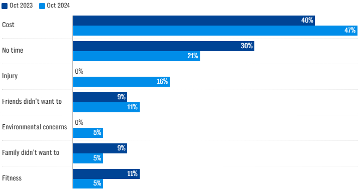
Even prices in destinations renowned for their budget-friendly credentials are under scrutiny. Bulgaria has always been the go-to for cheap skiing, but while Borovets and Bansko were named as two of Europe's cheapest ski resorts in this winter's Post Office Travel Money Ski Report, the total cost for a week's trip including a six-day lift pass, equipment hire, lessons, drinks and lunch on the slopes came in at £563.14 and £572.95 respectively. This excludes accommodation, transfers or flights — a week's half board package in a four-star hotel in Bulgaria next season with IgluSki starts at £460. Affordable ski holidays are in turmoil.

Why are ski holidays becoming unaffordable?

It's a combination of factors. Ski holidays are being hit with sky-high energy prices, taxes and charges on flights, as well as expensive labour costs and an exchange rate that continues to struggle. Where Britons could once get almost €2 or US$2 to the pound, we now get €1.19 or $1.30.

Why are people choosing not to book a ski holiday?



Source: The Mountain Trade Network

With heavy investment in state-of-the-art snow cannons, lifts and grooming machines – all essential for the preservation of the pistes – prices of lift passes in Europe and North America have also risen significantly to fund the expenditure. Daily lift tickets in the US now cost up to $300, while a weekly pass in Europe can weigh in at €400 per person. But when you consider the costs involved, it's not surprising.

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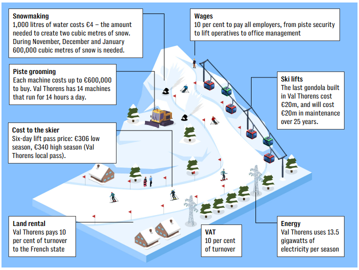
Jérôme Grellet is the CEO of SETAM, the lift management company in Val Thorens, France. He explained that rental of land, staff wages, artificial snow, piste grooming, computer systems and purchase and maintenance costs are increasingly inflated.

"As well as rising energy prices, the biggest cost increase we've seen is for lifts — they have nearly doubled in a decade," he said. "Gondolas are the same as aeroplanes, to buy and to run. 10 years ago a gondola would have cost €12 million, now that is €20 million and they cost the same to run over their lifetime."

How much does it cost to run a ski resort?
Europe's highest resort, Val Thorens, reveals the expense of keeping the slopes open



Snowmaking
1,000 litres of water costs €4 – the amount needed to create two cubic metres of snow. During November, December and January 600,000 cubic metres of snow is needed.

Wages
10 per cent to pay all employers, from piste security to lift operatives to office management

Piste grooming
Each machine costs up to €600,000 to buy. Val Thorens has 14 machines that run for 14 hours a day.

Ski lifts
The last gondola built in Val Thorens cost €20m, and will cost €20m in maintenance over 25 years.

Cost to the skier
Six-day lift pass price: €306 low season, €340 high season (Val Thorens local pass).

Land rental
Val Thorens pays 10 per cent of turnover to the French state

VAT
10 per cent of turnover

Energy
Val Thorens uses 13.5 gigawatts of electricity per season

Climate change is also influencing skiers' budgets. Ski Solutions said it has sent 33 per cent more clients to Cervinia – Italy's most snow-sure resort – this winter, despite *Telegraph Ski & Snow* reporting in October 2023 that the Italian resort had hiked its lift passes more than many others across the world.

Such demand inevitably hits prices on the ground, as resorts cover costs. The team also acknowledges that the addition of more luxury chalets and hotels is also a cost driver in Cervinia, once the preserve of more budget accommodation.

Prices of lift passes in Europe and North America have risen significantly in recent years Credit: getty

Despite this, skiers are prepared to pay a premium for guaranteed snow — now considered an expensive luxury. "The increased interest in Cervinia is likely the result of continued demand for high-altitude skiing," said a spokesman from Ski Solutions. "The village sits above 2,000 metres with a fantastic snow record, and skiers can explore up to 3,480 metres on the slopes."

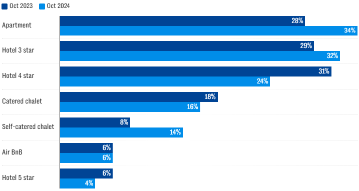
Elsewhere, earlier this season operator SkiWorld told *The Telegraph* that accommodation prices in Val Thorens – the highest resort in Europe – are now "eyewatering".

There is some good news. Most operators told *The Telegraph* year-on-year price increases started to slow last winter (2023/24), with accommodation representing the biggest cost. "In the years after the pandemic prices were going up 10 to 15 per cent per year," said James Gambrill, general manager of the Ski Club of Great Britain. "Everybody is looking at ways to save money where they can, and we are noticing increased traffic to the pages on our website that offer discounts to hotels, travel and equipment."

How are British skiers adapting?

Evidence shows skiers are trading down in accommodation, preferring to self-cater and drive to the mountains rather than forego their ski trip altogether. MTN consumer research in autumn showed that 34 per cent of skiers planned to stay in an apartment this winter and 32 per cent in a three-star hotel; compared with 28 per cent and 29 per cent respectively in 2023/24. Skiers choosing four-star accommodation has dropped from 31 per cent to 24 per cent.

What accommodation are skiers booking?



Source: The Mountain Trade Network

Peak Retreats specialises in ski holidays in France, offering a range of resorts including satellite villages that link into bigger ski areas — like Orelle (Three Valleys) or Samoëns (Grand Massif). "More clients are opting for self-catering because this offers far better value," explained Alison Willis, general manager. "It also means they can make lunches, which gives them more control over their budgets, a trend that has been picked up by resorts — lots of places now offer nice indoor picnic rooms or outdoor picnic areas with hot plates or barbecue on the slopes."

Willis said clients looking ahead to next winter are finding February 2026 half-term flights already expensive, so are opting to drive for the flexibility and value it offers — as well as the opportunity to shop in valley supermarkets before heading to the resort. Many resorts also now offer dynamic pricing, allowing skiers to buy their lift passes in advance and offering lower rates during off-peak periods, rather than remaining fixed all winter.

Gambrill said skiers cutting corners on insurance was the most worrying cost-saving trend though. "Even the premium insurance policies are selling less – the policies that allow people to ski off-piste without a guide – and that's a concern when they might do just one run and have an accident," he said.

What about ski holidays beyond Europe?

"In terms of the full holiday package, prices in the US have gone up the most — 10 per cent year-on-year," said Craig Charley from Ski Safari, with the majority of that driven by accommodation costs. But, he says, there are ways to mitigate expenses.

"More adventurous skiers can save a lot by using the Epic or Ikon pass products to ski at a number of resorts on one trip. Both are on sale now [for next winter] and customers can enjoy unlimited skiing from as little as £429 for the season."

The picture is different in Japan – which, thanks to a weak Yen, is emerging as more affordable for British skiers. "Japanese ski resorts remain wonderfully affordable," said Nick Coates, who specialises in tailor-made trips to Japan with his company Different Snow. "Lift passes are circa £50 per person per day, and a post-ski meal and beer costs less than you would pay in a provincial English town (Niseko excepted)."

Japan is emerging as an affordable destination for British skiers Credit: getty

But he warned: "Skiers cannot book late and chase the snow, it is booked out early because demand far outstrips supply. By October Japan is full from December to early March."

Are there still bargains to be had?

There are still deals to be had whether you buy late or take advantage of early-bird discounts. And booking in advance, as the majority of British skiers (59 per cent) do, allows you to pay in instalments.

Richard Sinclair of Sno said: "Many of our clients opt to spread payments with just a small amount going out each payday and tell us this way it feels like a free ski holiday by the time they go next winter."

All in all, skiing is on the up – the Ski Club's 2024 spring survey found that more skiers intended to take more than one ski holiday this winter. Meanwhile, 52 per cent planned two trips over 2024/25 compared with 38 per cent last year.

Gambrill added: "Resorts are telling us they've had a good winter and British skier numbers are up year-on-year, so despite saving money when they can, people are still skiing."

Term time savings

Sue Butcher is a teacher from Peterborough. She and her husband Tim Butcher, a former policeman, have skied with their now-adult sons since they were aged six.

Sue and Tim Butcher say they will continue to ski despite price rises

"Now our kids are not tied to school holidays, Tim takes them in January and it literally halves the cost," says Sue. "Then he takes me and it costs double – we nearly always have to drive and have seen prices rise, especially in larger resorts. Skiing is becoming a more middle-class sport than ever. But we will do it, we love skiing."

Late-season gamble

Nathan Ball from Dumfries takes his family of four skiing every year and this winter had to shop around more than ever before to find an affordable price.

Nathan Ball from Dumfries takes his family of four skiing every year

"We've had to risk an Easter break in Les Deux Alpes, and only one trip this winter. In 2018/19 we almost got three trips in for the same price. Accommodation is up, travel is up and ski passes have seen a dramatic hike — while we prefer Avoriaz it's now unattainable due to cost, so recently we've skied Les Sybelles, which is good value."

Plan the perfect ski holiday

The Telegraph's ski guides have everything you need to hit the slopes this winter, including expert reviews of the world's best resorts – from Austria and France, to Japan and Canada – the latest snow reports, top winter holidays, booking tips and gear guides.

Whether you're planning a family trip to the Alps or a bucket-list powder tour of North America, our ski experts are here to help you plan the perfect trip to the mountains.

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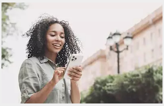
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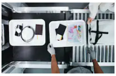
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