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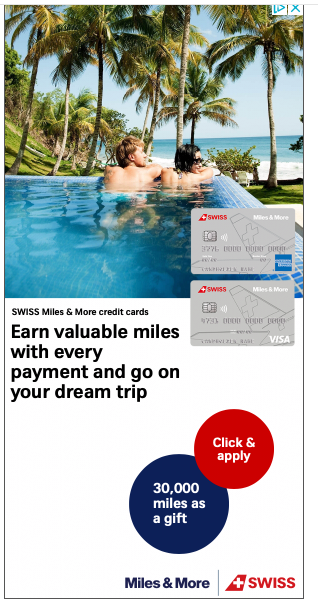

THE ESCAPIST

Chic chalets and A-list après: best ski resorts in Europe from Val d'Isère to Courchevel

From the A-listers you'll spot on the slopes to your essential apres-ski hotspots, *Mary Novakovich* has your essential guide to snow season

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Evening Standard

By Mary Novakovich | 14 January 2022

Did you see images last winter of snow-covered Alps and just whimper? All that lovely snow so close and yet so far.

This season, however, Europe's top ski resorts have opened their lifts once more and welcomed back skiers who have been pining to get back on those slopes. And as of today, ski holidays to France's many iconic resorts are back on the agenda too, as the travel ban on UK arrivals lifts.

The resorts haven't been idle, either, with new hotels, chalets and cable cars ready to take on all that pent-up demand. And the old Snow Train has been taken over by Travelski, which exclusively offers direct trains from St Pancras to Moûtiers and Bourg St-Maurice as part of packages to Tignes, Val d'Isère, Les Arcs, La Plagne, Méribel and Les Menuires.

Get booking now before everything is snaffled.

Val d'Isère, France

Val d'Isere

Best for: High-altitude style.

Party place: Cocorico at Rond Point —riotous ski-in apres at the bottom of the piste.

You'll spot: Hugh Grant and Harry Styles.

The prices match the altitude, but Val d'Isère — combined with its linked neighbour Tignes — does give you everything you want in a resort, including snow-sure slopes for all levels and lots of breathtaking off-piste. Then there's the buzzing social scene, with lots of live music

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and (expensive) champagne flowing at La Folie Douce. But, tempting though it is to keep dancing at the end of a ski day, wearing your ski boots after 6pm is a no-no. The resort's latest five-star hotel, Le K2 Chogori, opened last December, bringing K2 Collection's signature mix of Tibetan and Savoyard style. It joins the resort's other new five-star, Airelles Val d'Isère, which had the misfortune of opening just as the pandemic hit.

Ski Solutions has a week's B&B at relatively new Le Refuge de Solaise, which sits at 2,551m, from £1,510pp including flights (skisolutions.com).

Zermatt, Switzerland

Switzerland Tourism UK & Ireland

Best for: Mountain magic.

Party place: Hennu Stall on the Furi-Zermatt slope — order the metre-long "ski" of shots.

You'll spot: Thierry Henry, Nicole Kidman, Angelina Jolie.

It's hard to take your eyes off the Matterhorn as it looms crookedly over Zermatt and forms one of Switzerland's most gorgeous images. At its foot on Trockener Steg is the new Matterhorn Testcenter, a sleek place to test the latest gear. At super-swish Cervo Mountain Resort, a seventh lodge has opened along with the Mountain Ashram Spa and a third restaurant. For a classy alternative to après ski, try the boat-shaped Snowboat Bar beside the River Vispa in the centre of town, where gorgeous sushi is served with a huge selection of cocktails.

Matterhorn Chalets has seven nights' self-catering at two-bedroom Casa d'Amore from £2,557 (matterhornchalets.com)

Les Arcs, France

Andy Parant

Best for: Families, powder hounds... just about everyone.

Party place: Red Hot Saloon in Arc 1800 — live music and late-night partying.

You'll spot: Gal Gadot, Clémence Poésy.

What Les Arcs lacks in glamour it more than makes up for in incredibly varied terrain — think fun slopes, steep blacks, air-thinning peaks and sheltered woodland runs. Arc 1950 is the most attractive of the villages, and this winter is being enhanced by VIP Ski's new Bear Resort right by the ski lifts, with 30 hotel rooms, 12 apartments and a spa. Extend your lift pass to include La Plagne and take advantage of the new high-speed chairlift to Champagny-en-Vanoise. Expect chairlift chat about epic near misses and a good moan — or gloat — about the conditions.

VIP Ski has four nights at Bear Lodge from £754pp, including breakfast, dinner and transfers (vip-chalets.com)

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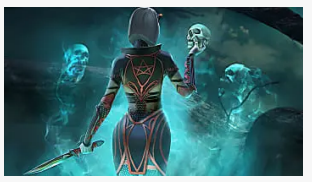
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Courchevel, France

Courchevel / David Andre

Best for: Glitzy celeb-spotters.

Party place: Funky Fox in Courchevel 1650 — the place to see and be seen.

You'll spot: Prince William, the Beckhams.

Don't let Courchevel's bling blind you to the superlative skiing in this starry corner of the Trois Vallées. This winter, expert skiers can tackle a new black run, Eclipse, which plunges into Le Praz at a drop of 970m and a 30 per cent gradient. Not for the faint hearted. For something more sedate, check out the new luxurious Ultima Courchevel Belvédère resort and its 13 ski-in-ski-out chalets. With four or five bedrooms in each, they're perfect for an upscale party. Avoid petty spats over food and drink by going fully-catered.

Ski Collection has seven nights' self-catering in a two-bedroom apartment in Coeur Courchevel 1850 from £4,412 including Eurotunnel crossing (skicollection.co.uk)

Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy

Cortina / Adam Batterbee

Best for: Old-school glamour.

Party place: Janbo in the town centre — for late-night good times.

You'll spot: Naomi Campbell, George Clooney.

The classy queen of the Dolomites rivals anything in the Alps for its jaw-droppingly beautiful granite mountains. And now those pink-tinged peaks will be easier to reach with the new gondola linking Tofane with Cinque Torri's fabulous Super 8 circuit — and, ultimately, the Sella Ronda circuit. Also new this winter is Hotel de LËN in the town centre and its rooftop spa. The relaxation lounge, with its floor-length windows, is a heavenly lesson in Zen design.

Inghams has seven nights' B&B at the Hotel Montana from £679pp including flights (inghams.co.uk)

Verbier, Switzerland

Verbier

Best for: Off-piste heaven.

Party place: Hotel Farinet in the town centre — look out for flame throwers and bar dancing.

You'll spot: Leonardo DiCaprio and Jude Law.

Perennial favourite among British skiers, Verbier offers an exhilarating taste of the high life — its off-piste is among the best in the world. The new high-speed Médran gondola between Verbier and Les Ruinettes will make life so much easier. This winter's new Mont 4 Zipline, the highest in Europe, starts at 3,300m and whooshes you at 100km/h until your head spins. In the town centre is completely renovated Hotel

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de Verbier, with new Swedish owners who have put a swanky Scandi stamp on it.

Scott Dunn has seven nights' half board at Cordée des Alpes from £1,500pp including flights (scottdunn.com)

Kitzbühel, Austria

Kitzbühel / Markus Mitterer

Best for: Medieval beauty and World Cup racing.

Party place: The Londoner — an English party pub, not for the faint-hearted.

You'll spot: Prince Albert of Monaco, Arnold Schwarzenegger, the Swarovski clan.

Every January, crowds descend on Kitzbühel to watch the World Cup's most thrilling downhill race on the Hahnenkamm course. But there's so much more, including an enchanting medieval centre and 233km of varied slopes. Mileage-hungry skiers can test the new circuit between SkiWelt and KitzSki, the longest in the world.

Crystal Ski Holidays has five nights' half-board at Hotel Bruggerhof from £489pp including flights (crystalski.co.uk)

Morzine-Avoriaz, France

Morzine

Best for: Village atmosphere.

Party place: Hotel Le Tremplin at the foot of Pléney — the annual closing party is not to be missed.

You'll spot: Zara Phillips.

These neighbours in the Portes du Soleil make a perfect couple. You've got pretty Morzine with its traditional Savoyard chalets and can also hop on the cable car to futuristic Avoriaz and its high-altitude slopes. At Morzine they've remodelled the Aigle red piste, giving skiers 2km of joy as they ski down from Nyon, and Eagle Park snow park has been given a makeover. Also check out Le Pas de l'Aigle, a glass-bottomed platform that gives you extraordinary views from Lake Geneva to Mont Blanc — and a 350m drop beneath you.

Pierre & Vacances has apartments in the new L'Amara Premium Residence from €1,447 for seven nights (pierreet vacances.com)

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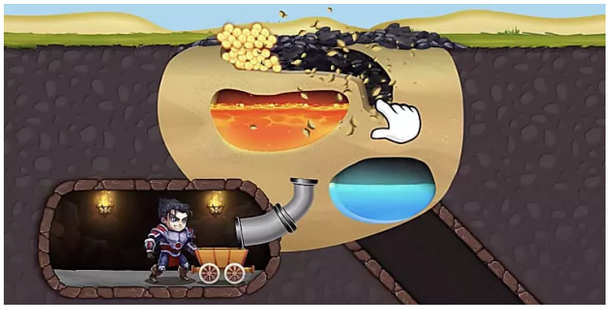

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