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**THE SUNDAY TIMES**

# Get your skis on: Five resorts for beginners

Don't just sit and gawp at the mountains like a clueless spectator. Get your skis on and get on the slopes. Here's where to start

*Sean Newsom* Published: 2 October 2011



Skiing isn't like other

Courchevel: a nice spot to learn to snowplough (Pierre Jacques)

holidays. People get hooked. Strapping two planks to your feet and diving downhill rapidly becomes an addiction you'll never break. The mountains in winter are among the most awe-inspiring environments you're ever likely to visit — and you don't just sit and gawp at them like some clueless spectator. You engage with them, testing your courage, learning their many moods and developing a healthy respect for their power. If you haven't tried it yet, it's time you did. Here are five of the best places to get started.

## 1 Mayrhofen, Austria

In Mayrhofen, beginners pretty much get their own mountain to practise on: the Ahorn. It's a rather smart one at that, set 1,300 metres above the valley floor, with stunning views south and east, and is now furnished with two cool bars: the great big party igloo that is the White Lounge ([white-lounge.at](http://white-lounge.at)), and Freiraum, a sleek concrete cube ([freiraum-mayrhofen.com](http://freiraum-mayrhofen.com)). It's like Shoreditch with a nursery slope. Inghams (020 8780 4444, [inghams.co.uk](http://inghams.co.uk)) has a week at the Jägerhof, a family-run three-star close to the key lift for beginners, from £649pp, half-board. Tuition and ski hire add £149; a lift pass costs £177.

## **2 Alpe d'Huez, France**

It's hard to think of a better spread of nursery slopes, and they're easily reached from VIP's recently built enclave of upmarket chalets. Most of these must be booked by a single party, but one, Club Chateau (0844 557 3119, [vip-chalets.co.uk](http://vip-chalets.co.uk)), can be taken by the room; prices start at £899pp, half-board. A lift pass costs £187, ski and boot hire is £51 (with Intersport; [intersport.com](http://intersport.com)), and a week of half-day lessons costs £120 (with ESF; [esf-alpedhuez.com](http://esf-alpedhuez.com)).

## **3 Courchevel 1650, France**

Your first snowplough turn feels complicated enough — you don't need to be sorting out linguistic and cultural complexities, too. So go with a British instructor. Courchevel 1650 is a stronghold of the Brit ski school New Generation (0844 484 3663, [skinewgen.com](http://skinewgen.com)), as well as the friendly chalet company Le Ski (01484 548996, [leski.com](http://leski.com)). A week at its Le Bonheur chalet starts at £699pp, half-board. A lift pass is £174, five two-hour lessons cost £161 (with New Generation; [skinewgen.com](http://skinewgen.com)), and ski and boot hire costs £67 (with Skiset; [skiset.com](http://skiset.com)).

## **4 Passo Tonale, Italy**

It may be 2.5 hours from the airport, but Passo Tonale has easy slopes and its relative obscurity has kept prices low. So it's a great place to make your first turns. Neilson (0844 879 8155, [neilson.co.uk](http://neilson.co.uk)) has a week at the three-star Eden hotel from £399pp, half-board. Six two-hour lessons start at £78 (with the Tonal-Presena ski school; [scuolasci-tonalepresena.it](http://scuolasci-tonalepresena.it)), a lift pass starts at £157, and ski and boot hire is £50 (with Maestri; [www.noleggiobymaestri.com](http://www.noleggiobymaestri.com)).

## **5 Breckenridge, Colorado, USA**

Crisp, cold Rocky Mountain snow is one of the most reassuring ski surfaces on the planet. Breckenridge has plenty — on its nursery slopes and in an array of wide, tree-lined, easy-peasy pistes that are perfect for developing your technique. It's not cheap, but it's the best possible start. A week at the new One Ski Hill Place, at the bottom of the key beginner's lifts, starts at £2,289pp, room-only, with Ski Safari (01273 224060, [www.skisafari.com](http://www.skisafari.com)). Breckenridge Ski & Ride School ([breckenridge.com](http://breckenridge.com)) runs a three-day beginner's programme for £192, including lift ticket, rentals and tuition. After that, a lift pass and ski and boot hire will start at £221.