



VIDEO

BE A BETTER SKIER

▶ Watch the first part of our new video tutorial series

THE SUNDAY TIMES

The best family ski resorts

Treat them to pools and fun ski schools. Treat yourself to a baby-sitter. Here's our pick of resorts fit for all the family

Sean Newsom Published: 2 October 2011



1. The pre-

There is a resort here to put a smile on any little one's face (Pierre Jacques)

Christmas week: Les Deux Alpes

Have you heard? This year, there's a full week of state-school holiday before Christmas Day, and British families have jumped at the chance to go skiing before the festivities begin. A few tour operators are running December 16-23 trips — leaving time to do the food shopping on the 24th — but with prices lower than for peak weeks, it's no surprise that packages offering childcare have sold out completely. If you can persuade someone else to cook Christmas lunch, there's still availability for December 17-24. For example, Mark Warner (0844 884 3643, markwarner.co.uk/ski) has that week at its Chaletotel Bérangère, in Les Deux Alpes, from £2,340 for a family of four, half-board. As in most British chalet-hotels, the decor is past its sell-by date, but it's roomy and well located, with a pool downstairs and a relaxed atmosphere.

2. A value chalet: Courchevel 1850

Crystal 2000 is a chalet-hotel sent from heaven to save British families from the relentless poshification of Courchevel 1850. It sits right on the edge of one of the best nursery slopes in the resort, yet it doesn't cost a bomb. Why? Because the owners are renovating another hotel nearby, and are renting it out to the family ski specialist Esprit (01252 618300, espritski.com) until the job's done. When it is, Crystal 2000 will probably be knocked down and turned into yet another swanky crash pad for the super-rich. So make use of it while you can.

Admittedly, it's a bit tatty in places, but it has a pool, the crèche is light and airy — and on your doorstep sits one of the world's most flattering networks of pistes. Any catches? Yes. Surprise, surprise, it's fully booked for almost every school-holiday week of the season. But can we let you into a secret? When The Sunday Times went to stay last February, a week before the half-term holidays, the place was full of families with children of primary-school age. Of course, we're not for one minute suggesting that you do the same. Still, just for interest's sake, you might like to know that a week, starting on February 5, will cost a family of four £3,011, half-board.

3. Half-term high life: Beaver Creek, Colorado

Fancy spoiling the family this winter? Whisk them off to Beaver Creek, in Colorado. It's a long flight (9-10 hours nonstop to Denver, with British Airways or United), but, once you're there, everyone will love the can-do attitude, the uncrowded slopes and, if they're first-timers, the fact that the beginners' area has an enclosed gondola, making the ride up as stress-free as possible. Beaver Creek markets itself under the slogan: "Not exactly roughing it." After a couple of days of the high life here, you might well agree.

The slopeside Park Hyatt is the place to stay — next to the ski-school meeting area, with a highly rated spa. There's still space in February half-term, when a week starts at £4,999, room-only, for a family of four staying in two rooms, with Ski Independence (0131 243 8097, ski-i.com).

4. Extended family Christmas: Val d'Isère, France

Christmas is a tough sell for most ski companies. Of course, everyone would love to wake up in the mountains on December 25, surrounded by snow. But what about Granny and Grandpa? Scott Dunn's clients have no such problem, because they can afford to take their extended family with them. Val d'Isère is the company's stronghold, and it still has a couple of chalets available for Christmas week, which this winter is being offered as an eight-nighter from December 18. The elegant, wood-panelled Chalet Solyneou sleeps 10 and has a pool, a private chef, two chalet hosts and a kids' club. It costs £27,142 for six adults and four children, half-board, including champagne and canapés each evening (020 8682 5450, scottdunn.com).

5. Italy made easy: Champoluc, Italy

If only there were more resorts like Champoluc. It still looks and feels like an Alpine village, rather than a big, clanking megaresort, yet it's plugged into some of the most sensational skiing on the planet, thanks to the Monterosa lift system. You have to be pretty handy on your planks to get the best of it, but there are scintillating runs for middling skiers — and the scenery is stunning. Best of all, a British company, Ski 2 (01962 713330, www.ski-2.com) has made Champoluc its winter home, and runs an English-speaking ski school there. So you get all the benefits of a "secret" resort without having to endure monosyllabic tuition. Other family-friendly services include a ski-deposit centre at the bottom of the lifts, a nursery and staff at the ski-hire centre.

The four-star Relais des Glaciers is the best hotel. A half-term week, arriving on February 12, costs £5,316, full-board, for a family of four, including lift passes and transfers, but not flights. The nearest airport is Geneva, served by airlines including EasyJet (0843 104 5000, easyjet.com), BA (0844 493 0787, ba.com) and Jet 2 (0871 226 1737, jet2.com).

6. La Dolce Vita San Cassiano, Italy

Powder Byrne (020 8246 5300, powderbyrne.co.uk) is the poshest of the family-ski specialists, and San Cassiano, in the Dolomites, is a canny choice of resort for its customers. Set halfway up a

mountain pass, it has a secretive, exclusive atmosphere and an easy-going ski area dotted with fabulous mountain restaurants. It's the perfect place for some gentle mid-morning cruising, followed by a long lunch, safe in the knowledge that the children are having fun in one of Powder Byrne's kids' clubs. Arriving on February 12, a week at the four-star Hotel Fanès, which has a spa and a pool, starts at £9,488 for a family of four, half-board.

7. Save money: Scheffau, Austria

Scheffau is not exactly a ski resort. Think of it more as a pretty Alpine village close to some lifts, with a bustling ski area on tap once you get up the mountain. The skiing comes courtesy of the SkiWelt — the biggest interconnected ski area in Austria — which favours beginners and intermediates, and therefore kids. It's best skied in midwinter, as it doesn't hold its snow well when the spring thaw sets in, and having to ride the bus each morning to reach the lifts is a bit of a hassle, but it does keep prices down.

Crystal (0871 231 2256, crystalski.co.uk) has a week for a family of four at the Hotel Alpin, in the middle of the village, for £4,265, half-board, arriving on February 11.

8. Sitting pretty: Saas Fee, Switzerland

As a rule, cosy Alpine charm doesn't come with good spring skiing attached. But there is one exception — Saas Fee. Ringed by mighty 4,000-metre peaks, it's a car-free resort that has grown into a small town without losing its character. There isn't a vast amount of skiing here, but it's high-quality stuff, and there's a separate area of stress-free nursery slopes for beginners and little ones, set away from the other pistes. Sounds like a good choice for Easter? You bet.

The Family Ski Company (01684 540333, familyski.co.uk) runs a small chalet-hotel with a pool in the resort. It has a week for £3,400, half-board, for a family of four, starting on April 7. The price doesn't include travel; fly into Sion from Stansted, with Snowjet (0845 070 4458, snowjet.co.uk).

9. High and mighty: Cervinia, Italy

Another good option for Easter is the high-altitude Cervinia, which sits just beneath the Matterhorn and has a lift system that will whisk you up to 3,480 metres. From there, you can nip over the Swiss border and ski Zermatt, too.

A place this elevated can be bleak when the clouds come down, so you'll need a comfortable base in which to squirrel yourselves away. That's where Club Med (0845 367 0670, clubmed.co.uk) comes in. For the kids, it offers sports, "creative activities" and games. For grown-ups, there's a spa and a steam room. Everyone can enjoy the pool. The price for a week, starting on April 9, is £4,468 for a family of four, and that's all in: flights, transfers, full-board, lift passes, ski tuition, childcare and equipment hire.

10. Self-catering: La Tania, France

There's one sure way to keep a lid on costs: book a self-drive, self-catering holiday. It's not for first-timers — one of you has to know how a ski resort works, or you'll waste a whole day working out how to get up the mountain — but, as long as there's a little experience in the team, you can pack as much skiing into a week as everyone else, at a significant saving.

La Tania is home to several English-speaking ski schools, including New Generation (skinewgen.com) and Magic in Motion (www.magic-latania.com). Peak Retreats (0844 576 0170, peakretreats.co.uk) has a two-bedroom flat in the refurbished Christiana block for £2,050, self-catering, over the half-term week, arriving on February 11. The price includes Eurotunnel crossings.

[Article updates](#)

[Article history](#)

[Following](#)

Click to revisit [articles](#), see [updates](#) and [follow](#) stories that