

COUNTRY & TOWN HOUSE

SKI SPECIAL

Edited by *Felix Milne*



HIT THE
*WHITE
STUFF*
THIS
WINTER

ON PISTE

Fusalp Avery
jacket, £1,290;
Elancia fuseau ski
pants, £600; Arctic
Chapka, £300.
fusalp.com

SNOW NEWS DAY

Gabriella Le Breton and Felix Milns tell us what's hot in the coolest places on Earth



Touch up your skiing in Méribel under the tutelage of David Lindsay



Board the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express

HOT HOTELS »

The biggest hotel news of the winter comes from the motherlode of Alpine glamour, St Moritz. **Grace La Margna** (gracehotels.com) is already turning manicured heads in the ritzy Swiss resort. Think cocktails in the original art-deco bar to the tunes of a live DJ, a wine list that champions English grapes and lakeview bedrooms that blend original features with slick minimalist design.

Insta-worthy design is also a feature of the **Hotel Faern Crans-Montana** (faernresorts.com), another exciting addition to a Swiss grande dame, with quirky interiors by British designers Run for the Hills. The concept of two friends inspired by Hoxton Hotels, Faern aspires to transport the lifestyle club vibe to the mountains.



ABOVE & BELOW: The Ritzy Grace La Margna

⚡ OFF THE BEATEN PISTE

Master your ski turns and catch up on the local gossip under the tutelage of the son of Méribel's founding father, Colonel Peter Lindsay. Born and raised in Méribel, David Lindsay is launching specialised three- and six-day coaching programmes with **Ecole du Ski Français** (esf-uk.co.uk) for intermediate to advanced level skiers.

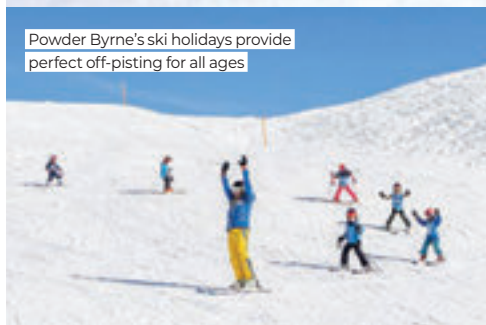
For those after blissful isolation and bottomless powder turns in British Columbia, bespoke ski specialist **Mabey Ski** (mabeyski.com) is offering the opportunity to stay at the remote McGillivray Pass Lodge, only accessible by helicopter. Once delivered to the cosy log cabin, tucked deep in snow-choked peaks north of Whistler, guests have to earn their turns, ski touring through the pristine Coast Mountains.

Scott Dunn (scottdunn.com) has joined forces with the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express to give rail travel to the French Alps and Dolomites a decidedly luxurious twist. After travelling from London to Paris aboard the Eurostar, a private transfer whisks guests across the French capital to board the iconic Venice Simplon-Orient-Express. Travelling overnight in the opulent comfort of a historic suite, they awake either in the French Alps for a week's holiday at Val d'Isère's Le Blizzard hotel or in Venice, for two nights in the City of Water before travelling on to the plush Hotel La Perla in the heart of the Dolomites.

Forsthofgut's stables will satisfy your horse-mad progeny



Powder Byrne's ski holidays provide perfect off-piste for all ages



« SKIING WITH SMALLS

The go-to for ritzy family ski holidays, **Powder Byrne** (powderbyrne.com) is launching a dedicated off-piste guiding programme for teenagers. Intended for confident skiers aged 16-19, the Teenage Guiding programme complements its existing kids' ski offerings (for ages 3-17) and will see qualified ski guides lead them around the slopes, covertly progress their skiing.

If your little ones are more into ponies than powder, check into the wholesomely luxurious **Forsthofgut** (forsthofgut.at). The family-owned hotel offers ski-in/ski-out access to the expansive Saalbach-Hinterglemm-Leogang ski area as well as its own stables, meaning your horse-mad progeny can work towards their gold riding badge while you master your carving on the slopes.

Families looking for a Christmas to remember will be excited to hear that illustrious children's party entertainers **Sharky & George** (sharkyandgeorge.com) have announced their first chalet partnership, with Arula Chalets in Lech. While parents sit back and luxuriate in one of the finest chalets in the Alps, their little angels can enjoy discos, science workshops, and visits from Father Christmas.

Finally, take the trip to Cormayeur for family week with Archy Events, who are taking over these Italian slopes from 17-23 December with fantastic games to keep them occupied, as you hit the pristine pistes (cormayeurmontblanc.it).

NEWS FROM ACROSS THE POND



ABOVE AND BELOW:
Jackson Hole's two sides

Our transatlantic friends are offering a dizzying array of reasons to hop across the Pond this winter. In Colorado, **Aspen** (aspensnowmass.com) is launching 153 acres of new terrain on Aspen Mountain. Named Hero's in honour of the locals who helped to create it, the new terrain pod includes 19 chutes, four pistes, three gladed areas, and a new chairlift. **Steamboat Springs** (steamboat.com) is celebrating its 60th birthday in style, emerging from a \$200 million renovation project with a transformed base area boasting new restaurants, shops and attractions as well as new ski terrain and lifts that make it Colorado's second largest ski area. Hot on the heels of its snowiest winter ever, **Jackson Hole Mountain Resort** (jacksonhole.com), Wyoming is poised to open for its longest season yet, running 143 days from 24 November 2023-14 April 2024. Held in reverence by expert skiers, Jackson Hole also warrants a top spot on the family bucket list. Look no further than the new Chalet Collection by onefinestay which provides the perfect base for all powderhounds in the Rockies. Experience snowtubing and the impressive aerial tram, before returning to one of six lodge homes (onefinestay.com). In Canada, **Whistler Blackcomb** (whistlerblackcomb.com) welcomes the resort's first purpose-built, fully serviced ski lodge this December, the Wedge Mountain Lodge & Spa. Up there with the über chalets of the Alps, the sprawling ten-bedroom lodge arcs around an outdoor pool, hot tub, plunge pool and sunken firepit, with further perks including a games room, private cinema and wine cellar-cum-après-ski den. ■

CHALET CHAT »

For the best of both chalet and hotel worlds, head to Courchevel, where the opulent **Le K2 Palace** (lek2palace.com) is launching five suite-chalets. Each of the handful of Tibetan-inspired newcomers comprises three bedrooms, including a master suite with hammam, a spacious living area and dedicated breakfast butler. One valley over, Méribel is set to welcome **Les Chalets de Tueda** (leschaletsdetueda.com), so named after the nearby Tueda Nature Reserve, a village of ten interlocking chalets designed by one of the resort's master architects, Christian Rey-Grange.

In Switzerland, the Verbier specialist **Ski Verbier Exclusive** (skiverbierexclusive.com) brings us the fabulous five-bedroom **Chalet Teredo**. With a secluded spot just above the Savoleyres lift, the elegant property ticks the wow box with a mountain-view indoor pool with floor-to-ceiling windows that open to a sunny terrace with a sunken hot tub. A rare addition to the exclusive St Moritz chalet scene comes from Leo Trippi (leotrippi.com) in the form of the six-bedroom **Chalet Via Brattas**. Hunkered into mountains above the Kulm hotel, the slickly refurbished home offers lake views, a cinema, gym and sprawling octagonal master suite.



The fabulous
five-bedroomed
Chalet Teredo



MONCLER
Padded wool cardigan,
£800. moncler.com



JETSET
Acquarius
embroidered
ski pants, £850.
netaporter.com



INUUKII
Bomber Star boots,
€350. inuikii.com



GOLDBERGH
Maple leaf ski top,
£189. goldbergh.com

COOL AS ICE

Turn the slopes into a catwalk for skiwear that is as stylish as it is snugly



CANADA GOOSE
Balaclava, £295.
canadagoose.com



CELINE EYEWEAR
Studded ski goggles,
£480. netaporter.com



FUSALP
Kira ski suit, £1,070.
fusalp.com



CHANEL @ FRONT ROW
Muffler, rent from £245.
frontrow.uk.com



SHOREDITCH SKI CLUB
Diana puffer jacket, £695.
shoreditchskiclub.com

MOON BOOT @ BY ROTATION
Snow boots, rent from
£18. byrotation.com



PERFECT MOMENT
Piste sweater, rent
from £7. [perfectmoment
rental.com](http://perfectmomentrental.com)

SUITE LIFE, CHALET CHIC

Forget the AirBnB. These are the mountainous getaways and alpine boltholes to book this season



ST ALBAN, Hotel – La Clusaz, French Alps

BEST FOR ART DECO-INSPIRED SHORT BREAKS

Unlike many purpose-built French resorts, La Clusaz is a delightful year-round mountain village, and the jewel in the Aravis region's chain. The Aravis resorts are only 90 minutes from Geneva so a great short break destination, and La Clusaz is a perfect setting for the sophisticated art deco glamour of the St Alban. A bijoux hotel in the centre of the village, the comfortable rooms of the St Alban are very much in the style of a natural modern mountain aesthetic, with pine-clad walls and ceilings, modern industrial lighting and tartan wool throws, but it is the communal areas where they have pushed the proverbial boat out.

Indeed the lobby and bar channel ocean liner glamour, with art deco detailing and lettering creating a deeply cool ambience, beautifully styled with vintage boxing gloves, retro video games and library book shelves concealing tan leather seating nooks. The restaurant space is small, so only breakfast and simple bar snacks are served – think platters of mountain meats and cheese, washed down with mean Manhattan cocktails. Too often mountain hotels are so comfortable you never want to leave, so this is a great base to explore the town yet be immediately cocooned on your return.



The Nuxe spa has a clubhouse feel, with half-height wood panelling, rattan hanging egg chairs and duck egg blue walls. Wall to wall art deco cool. *Felix Milns*

BOOK IT: From €220 (two sharing) on a room-only basis.
hotel-st-alban.com



ALPAGA, Hotel – Megève, French Alps

BEST FOR ROMANTIC BREAKS

High on a south-facing plateau with stunning views of Mont Joly and Mont Blanc, the Alpaga is a wonderfully boutique hotel spread over four interconnecting chalets with shingle roofs, copper gutters and aged pine cladding. Six neighbouring chalets available on exclusive hire make up the hamlet.

Recently taken over by the Beaumier group, the hotel has had a sensitive makeover that ups the mountain charm. Paris design gurus Charles & Co and Saint-Lazare have injected some real soul into the spaces, be that the wall of antique wooden kitchen utensils, herringbone-clad doors or monumental metal fireplace.

A couple of clicks out of town, the setting feels especially remote and exclusive, with its sun-kissed terrace and fire pit for afternoon sundowners a particular gem. Don't fear though – there is a very reliable shuttle service to head to the slopes or town.

The bar, restaurant and spa all inhabit separate chalets, thankfully linked above and below ground for snow days, and the outdoor timber hot tub has the best Mont Blanc view in Megève. Food is paramount here, with a small bistro cheek by jowl with the Michelin-starred Table d'Alpaga. *Felix Milns*

BOOK IT: From €600 (two sharing) on a B&B basis.
beaumier.com





CHALET BLACKCOMB, Chalet – Val d'Isère, French Alps

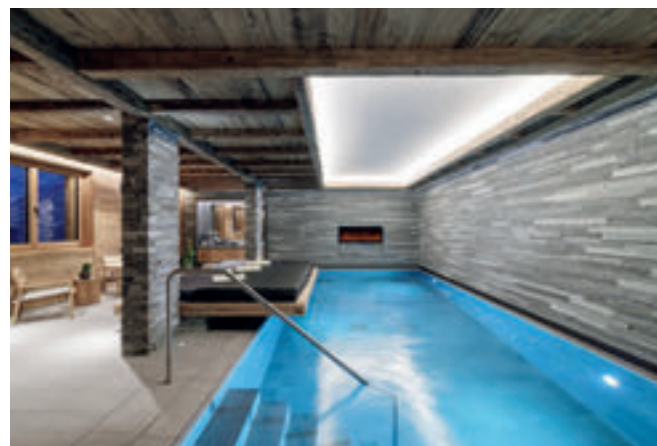
BEST FOR LAID-BACK PRIVACY AND LUXURIOUS WELL-BEING

Totally renovated for last year's winter season, Chalet Blackcomb is one of Val d'Isère's swankiest catered chalets. Spread across three floors of stunning reclaimed pine and spruce wood, five stylish ensuite bedrooms are awash in calming neutral tones and fine wools, linens and throws. Located in the private Domaine de Cacholet neighbourhood, this is a chic boutique retreat with a difference. It's one of luxury operator Consensio's innovative Relaxed Catered Chalets, where service is less formal by design.

The chilled set-up is ideal for families and independently minded groups looking to sample a few local restaurants, via the Consensio driver of course. The Relaxed Catering programme includes breakfast, afternoon tea and, five nights a week, two-course dinners plus cheese, with a particular emphasis on plant-based, healthy dishes (but only when desired). A personal concierge is still reachable 24/7 and, as with every Consensio chalet, Perrier-Jouët runs on tap.

Wellbeing is the name of the game with an entire floor dedicated to an oxygenated fresh-water pool and relaxation area. Repair to the outdoor hot tub under snowflake-speckled skies with fulsome splashes of champagne cheerfully delivered by your hosts. There's an embarrassment of space for stretching piste-addled limbs: the large open-plan lounge with crackling fireplace has seating for a small army, and the super-size dining table is complemented by a sun-catching balcony and cozy bar area bursting with complimentary wines and spirits. A kitchen snug with fireplace is ideal to observe the chefs in action. Of special interest to families, a clever floor-to-ceiling glass wall acts as a sound-proof barrier between the two zones and there's a full store of games, books, sledges and toys. *Leslie Wolt.*

BOOK IT: From €29,800 for seven-days of exclusive use on a chalet board basis (sleeps ten). consensiochalets.co.uk



ARULA CHALETS, Chalet – Lech, Austrian Alps

BEST FOR A BOND-STYLE BASH

Peeking out from the elbow of the Lech valleys are the Arula Chalets. These two sibling lodges ooze 007-appeal – you can easily picture Bond kicking his feet up here after a hard day in sporty pursuit of a nefarious villain (probably down the north face of the nearby Valluga mountain).

Both chalets are decadent options for snowseekers looking to après-ski in style. Classic in style with postcard-idyllic timber cladding, the big sister of the pair is Arula One, which sleeps a whopping 22 people. The swish private bar is complete with shuffleboard table, plush sofas topped with mountainous blankets, and – of course – its very own barman. A drink here could be an expertly twisted negroni, or a bottle chosen from the vast wine cellar. If the party really gets going, the garage, which sits three floors down, can convert into a party barn, DJ included.

The twin chalet, Arula Two, sleeps a smaller party of eight, and features much of the same in miniature. Both chalets boast steamy spas, generous pools, in-house masseuses, and fantastic concierge teams. Factor in the private chef catering your every passing whim, and you'll genuinely be reticent to head for the boot room each morning. *Tessa Dunthorne*

BOOK IT: From €9,500 on a chalet-board basis. thearulachalets.com

TENNERHOF, Hotel – Kitzbühel, Austrian Alps**BEST FOR TRADITIONAL HUNTING LODGE-STYLE LUXURY**

Dating back to 1271, Kitzbühel is one of the most historic towns in the Alps. It first became prosperous as a mining town in the 17th century, when they built most of the fabulous old buildings in the heart of the pedestrianised cobble streets, paving the way for its prestigious position today. Nowhere encapsulates this better than the Tennerhof, the town's original five-star hotel.

Located above the town, with unbeatable views of the turrets and spires of the town backdropped by the fearsome descent of the Hahnenkamm downhill, the site was known as the Weather Farmhouse in the 14th century, as the farmer would warn the town about incoming storms from his vaunted locale.

It is a view that regularly drew Ian Fleming here for writing retreats months at a time, with his favourite room now subtly branded 007. Every room is different, and every wardrobe a unique antique. Many have open fireplaces and/or stuben-style heaters and ornate colourful hand-painted panelling. There's a different four-course menu every day, with the half-board restaurant sporting two Gault Millau hats and its gourmet restaurant four. Despite sleeping up to 130 guests it has a timeless intimate feel. There are also more contemporary chalet-style apartments in two new buildings for those that want a more private experience. *Felix Milns*

BOOK IT: From €479 (two sharing) on a B&B basis. tennerhof.com

**GRAND TIROLIA, Hotel – Kitzbühel, Austrian Alps****BEST FOR SPACE ON A NORTH AMERICAN SCALE**

Located a short drive from town on its own golf course, the newly refurbished Grand Tirolia is all about space. The rooms are huge, the spa is cavernous, with both indoor and outdoor pools, and there are multiple different restaurants in this sprawling resort-style hotel. And it's only getting bigger – a new building of 70 family suites and spa is planned for December 2024, and this winter a new jazz club will open, promising live music every night.

Considering its scale, the designers have done a great job of creating cosy spaces. Reeded timber panels undulate across the walls of the main restaurant, from which guests can peek into the open kitchen, clad in striking marine blue crackle-glazed tiles. Walk further towards the bar, and you enter a space with a natural club lounge-feel, with its tan leather seats, earthy suedes, and moody black and white behind-the-scenes shots from Bond movies.

On the topic of the restaurant: don't miss dinner in the Gasthaus Eichenheim, the golf clubhouse diner, where chef Manuel Satzinger has been experimenting with fabulous Japanese flavours for the last ten years, alongside more traditional Tyrolean fare. Golfers will also love the indoor golf simulator as an alternate après idea; ski all day then finish with a round at Pebble Beach. *Felix Milns*

BOOK IT: From €318 (two sharing) on a room only basis. homage-hotels.com





CHALET V, Chalet – La Tzoumaz, Bernese Alps

BEST FOR BACK DOOR DESIGNER ACCESS TO VERBIER

Those in the know love La Tzoumaz for its laid-back family feel and back door access to Verbier. Chalet V is the perfect base here for design-conscious skiers who want a bit more bang for their chalet buck. With its double height vaulted ceilings, to the dining and living space and stunning wraparound south-facing balcony, the chalet combines beautifully rustic aged timbers with contemporary flair. And there's all manner of mod-cons: from its year-round outdoor heated pool, hot tub and fire pit to its indoor sauna, cinema room, pinball machine and table tennis.

The interiors are true mountain chic with beautiful Bocci rain droplet pendant lights suspended above the oversized dining table. Nico, the in-house chef, serves up gourmet fare from the open-plan Officine Gullo-style kitchen on a different dinner set each evening, celebrating both food and design sur la table.

The charming bedrooms boast glam touches like gold drum bedside tables, and en-suite bathrooms surprise with sky blue accents laden with Tiffany and Hermès toiletry treats. And of course waking up to wonderful south facing views over the Haut de Cry mountain range is a luxury that can never be overstated. *Caroline Milns*

BOOK IT: from 32,700 CHF per week (exclusive hire) on a Chalet board basis, sleeps 8+4. thechaletedit.com



STEIN ERIKSEN LODGE, Hotel – Deer Valley Ski Resort, United States

BEST FOR AMERICAN OLD-WORLD CHARM

Deer Valley, Utah, is a high-end ski resort that exudes luxury, and the Stein Lodge is the jewel in its crown. Imagined by Norwegian ski champion Stein Eriksen, who also designed the wider resort, this was the luxury property that started it all, back in the early 1980s. Think huge stone fireplaces, leather sofas, heavy wood and exposed beams, retro ski art and (faux) fur throws, creating a grand yet comfortable lodge with an old-world charm.

It is a skiers-only resort with heated sidewalks and valets on hand to help carry tired skiers' gear after a day on the slopes. The Lodge has hot tubs on balconies looking out over the Wasatch Mountain range and is home to Utah's best rated spa, with treatments like the High-Altitude Relief Package helping visitors adjust to the change in elevation. And then there's the wine cellar, stocked with 20,000 bottles, with its on-site sommelier present to help navigate the list.

Situated mid-mountain, from the slopes the Lodge looks something like an alpine hamlet with all you need for a gourmet getaway. Complete with its own coffee shop, the Troll Hallen lounge serving up lively après, piste-side Alpenglobes, and the much lauded Glitretind restaurant, one of Utah's most exciting dining spots. Expect a twist on American classics, such as lobster pot pie and bison ribeye. Eating aside, there's the 56-seat cinema, the indoor and outdoor pools and jam-packed games room. *Katie Bamber*

BOOK IT: Luxury King rooms from \$1,270, suites from \$1,880, steinlodge.com ■



THE SOUND OF MUSIC

Ischgl remains one of the world's best parties, says *Felix Mihns*

Ischgl made headlines worldwide for all the wrong reasons at the beginning of the pandemic. Allegedly, this was ground zero for superspreading the virus through Europe. Criminal charges were brought against the resort but prosecutors later dropped the case.

It appears Ischgl was more a victim of its own reputation as a party town, plus Covid's winter origins and the nature of Austrian après, where revellers cram into bars and clubs in a vibrant mix of beer, oompah beats and bonhomie.

This reputation is in no small part built on the town's fantastic legacy of free mountain concerts. Every December Ischgl kicks off the winter season with a free concert at the base of the gondola, followed by spring and season closing concerts that take place high up on the Silvretta plateau in the heart of the ski area, with incredible 360-degree mountainscape views.

Headliners across the last 30 years include Elton John (twice), Lionel Richie, The Beach Boys and The Killers, and this year it was

George Ezra's turn to bring his *Green, Green Grass* to the brilliant white of the mountains. Ezra was clearly impressed with the venue: 'This is the most beautiful place we have ever played. Our view is much better than yours!'

It's a fantastic set up for a concert. You can ski all morning then stop off for lunch and the gig, then jump back on one of several adjacent chair lifts for a few more runs. And the acts clearly love it as much as the crowd. Elton John was the first really big name to play back in 1995, and was so enamoured he came back to play again in 2008. His piano was painstakingly brought up the mountain by two snowcats, while he flew up in a white leather helicopter. The Pussycat Dolls did not make such a great impression, boldly announcing 'Hello Australia!' as they took to the stage, echoing a famous George Bush gaffe.

While the concerts are still part of Ischgl's DNA, it's working hard to round out its riotous reputation. Last season was the swansong for the Pacha nightclub, the only alpine outpost of the Ibiza club night for the last 20 years, while the resort has just opened an immense public spa and wellness complex. It's a fantastic place to visit either with friends or family, and if you can time it with a springtime concert then you will be in *Paradise*, to quote George Ezra.

BOOK IT: From £1,469pp for a seven-night half-board stay at Hotel Zalwonder (two sharing). zalwonder.com. Return flights from Gatwick to Innsbruck start from £76pp. Concerts on 25 November 2023, 31 March, 14 April, 30 April 2024. ischgl.com ■



Felix meets 2023
headliner George Ezra

THREE OF THE BEST MOUNTAIN FESTIVALS



ROCK THE PISTES, Portes du Soleil, 17-23 March

There are seven main lunchtime mountain-top gigs and over 40 après concerts spread across different Portes du Soleil resorts. rockthepistes.com

TOMORROWLAND, Alpe d'Huez, 16-23 March

This takeover brings eight indoor and outdoor stages and over 35 acts to the sunny slopes of Alpe d'Huez, including huge names from the world of electronic dance music. tomorrowland.com



ZERMATT UNPLUGGED 9-13 April

For a more chilled out vibe, check out the acoustic-only sets and stages, all 17 of them, that are found on the beautiful car-free streets of Zermatt. zermatt-unplugged.ch ■



GIVE ME CHILLS

The zero degree line keeps creeping up, say *Abigail Butcher* and *Felix Milns* – here's how resorts are trying to protect your snow

This August, a record was set in the Alps, but it wasn't a good one. No mountain froze overnight, because the altitude at which temperatures fell below freezing, known as the zero degree line, climbed to 5,298m for the first time since records began. The previous record of 5,184m was set in 2022 – whereas it fluctuated between 3,000m and 4,000m between the summers of 1991 and 2002.

That the zero degree line has climbed so substantially has resulted in Alpine glaciers losing more than 60 percent of their volume since 1850. Ski resorts now accept the future is uncertain and know they must act immediately to change the way they operate. Some estimates suggest that by 2050, resorts under 1,200m could be entirely without snow.

Sandra Picard of Compagnie des Alpes, which operates some of the largest ski resorts in France including La Plagne, Les Arcs and Val d'Isère-Tignes, said: 'By 2055, December will be the most critical month and it will be difficult for us to open more than 50 percent of the slopes – and, to be honest, it's not going to improve. There is not a straightforward solution for the future.'

As well as trying to future-proof the resorts with ideas such as moving beginner areas to the top of the mountains, resorts are slashing carbon emissions and reducing energy and water requirements as fast as is practically possible to limit the damage ski resorts are adding to the environment.

While it's people travelling to ski resorts that takes the largest chunk of the emissions pie, operating ski areas is also energy heavy. Compagnie des Alpes identified that during the 2021/22 ski season, 47 percent of its carbon emissions – 29,571 tonnes of CO₂e – was from the ski area. By converting grooming machines to HVO (hydrotreated vegetable oil, often known as 'renewable diesel'), using renewable energy and investing in the very latest, energy-efficient snow guns, they can move towards their goal of net zero in 2050.

But some areas are more advanced than others. Serre Chevalier already produces 30 percent of the energy needed to run its ski area. In Italy's Dolomiti Superski area, where timely opening of the pistes in December has long relied on snowmaking, lift operators have for decades invested in the most modern snow guns, which use half the water and electricity of their 1980s predecessors.



The Grand Massif became the world's first ski area to be awarded the Green Globe label in 2016, a sustainable tourism certification

'This means efficiency at its best and optimal use of resources – simultaneously good for business and good for the environment,' says spokesman Dr Diego Clara. 'All our lifts and snow guns run with renewable power from hydroelectric plants, so there is no CO₂ – for us here this is normal practice, but journalists take it as sensational news.'

Another environmental pioneer, Laax will this winter open the first gondola to operate on demand, only releasing cabins onto the track when they are needed – saving energy when they're not. Laax has been built on sustainable credentials since the 1970s and aims to become not just carbon neutral but an energy-producing resort in the future.

The small, purpose-built resorts of Anzère (Switzerland) and Flaine (France) were both built around huge biomass boilers – way ahead of the sustainability game. In 2016, Flaine (with its fellow Grand Massif ski resorts) became the first ski area in the world to attain the Green Globe label, and in 2008 was the first in France to set up a study to monitor the biodiversity of the ski area, measure the impact of skiing on the mountains and understand how to improve practices.

Malvina Sculo, environmental project manager at Domaine Skiable de Flaine, said: 'Most of our snow groomers have changed to HVO and resort vehicles will follow, snow cannons work mainly on gravity, we compost waste food where we can and have created sensitive areas within the ski area to remind skiers they are sharing the mountain with nature.'

It's about the small details, too, she said: 'We now produce a ski map online, or in an app, and if people want a paper one we charge €1 – we used to print 200,000 but now only 6,000. We even grow tomatoes on the magic carpet in the village during the summer months.'

So it's an apt resort for Pierre & Vacances' premium residence Les Terrasses d'Eos, which has been awarded the Green Key label – the first internationally recognised independent environmental label.

And as Mavina eloquently put it, 'for everyone who loves the mountains, it's about doing what we can, when we can.'

BOOK IT: From £338pp for a seven-night stay at Pierre & Vacances' Les Terrasses d'Eos (four sharing). pierreetvacances.com
For more information on Flaine visit en.flaine.com ■

FUN FOR ALL THE FAMILY

The resorts that cater for all. By *Felix Mihns*

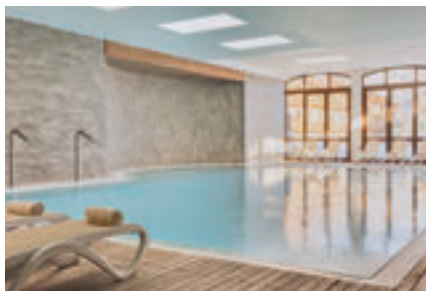
All-inclusive skiing is definitely on the rise, and market-leading Club Med is riding the winter wave it set in motion 65 years ago. Last winter, its bookings were up by a third, as cost-conscious families look to lock in savings. And it's not just in the French Alps – Club Med now offers ski holidays in Canada, Japan and Switzerland, plus one very special place in the Italian Alps: Club Med Pragelato Sestrière.

Sestrière is part of the Milky Way ski area in the Alps, and with almost 400km of pistes is one of Europe's largest. Stretching across the border from Italy into Montgenevre in France, it has some excellent steep north-facing pistes as well as more gentle snow-sure slopes, with much of the skiing above 1,800m.

In typical Club Med fashion, group lessons and guiding are included in the all-inclusive packages for adults and children alike. There's something reassuring about putting your children in the care of a 'maestro' for their ski lessons – especially when they are as charming and professional as the instructors we had.

It is becoming increasingly popular with British guests. Brits have long been drawn to neighbouring Sauze D'Oulx, but Sestrière too has been getting steadily more popular. So too has Club Med, with an all-inclusive package that seems to be striking a real chord in our more cost-conscious times (and it really does cover it all – ski passes, guiding, and even lunches are included, plus as much childcare as you could possibly want).

Coming back to the hotel for lunch is quite an alien concept for British skiers, but the food is so good it is sorely tempting, especially for our daughters for whom the daily changing buffets were manna from heaven. There are, however, also five mountain restaurants across the ski area where you can eat free of charge. At Aquila Nera the



Club Med Pragelato Sestrière is a picture-perfect skiing escape



mention of Club Med is enough to magic up a couple of glasses of prosecco and a platter of mountain meat and cheese before the menus even arrive.

In fact, my only criticism of the food here is just that the sheer volume, quality and opportunities to eat are so generous that I could not remember what it was like to feel hungry. One night the *mi-cuit* salmon, on the live chef's station in the bar, was so good we had practically eaten an entire dinner before going to the restaurant.

The main restaurant is buffet style, with 12 stations serving something different each evening. As well as your staple fresh pasta, pizza and grill, there are dishes like beef and prune *tajine*, *magret de canard* and a different fresh fish every evening. It's like a

who's who of French and Italian cuisine.

The 'Crazy Sounds' disco and nightly shows are somewhat more divisive. A hallmark of Club Med that taps into the surprising French penchant for line dancing, those that want a more chilled after-dinner *digestif* can escape to the new wine bar across the square, for one last all-inclusive cocktail before bed.

BOOK IT: From £6,463 for a seven night all-inclusive stay at Club Med Pragelato Sestrière for a family of two adults & two children under 11 years old, including transfers and return flights from London (LHR). clubmed.co.uk



⚡ KIDS GO FREE AT HOTEL LE MOTTARET

Who doesn't love a pool party? Certainly all the kids who were staying at Hotel Le Mottaret last Easter gave it a resounding thumbs up, even though it faced stiff après competition from tubing high into the air onto an airbag just outside the hotel. But such are the delights of staying at Hotel Le Mottaret.

This quietly unassuming ski-in ski-out hotel has been offering great value family holidays in the heart of the Three Valleys for over 30 years, and they have nailed the concept. With a focus on affordable flexibility, this is three-star holidaying that feels like five-star. Not constrained by Saturday to Saturday bookings, kids go free in family rooms (up to 18 years old), and overall the hotel offers exceptional value for money.

There's a relaxed vibe in the crushed velvet, antique mirror and chandelier-strewn lounge. Downstairs, the restaurant serves up nightly buffets. We had oysters, giant prawns, smoked salmon and sushi on the seafood night.

Outside of the weekly pool party, the spa and pool area is more chilled, with a hammam and indoor hot tub. You can also book a slot in the outdoor jacuzzi on the terrace and soak up the last rays of the day with a glass of bubbly, raising a toast to affordable luxury in the Alps.

BOOK IT: From £1,400 for a seven-night stay at the Hotel Le Mottaret (four sharing a family room, kids go free), on a half-board basis. ski-france.co.uk



⚡ THE MAGIC OF OZ

Though it's more winding mountain than yellow brick road, there is definitely something wizard about Oz-en-Oisans, a small satellite village in the adjacent valley to Alpe d'Huez. One of the lesser-known treasures of the Isère region of the Alps, Oz is a small family-friendly village, a quick seven-minute gondola to the heart of the Alpe d'Huez ski area.

Famed for its 300 sunny days per year, the mountains stretch up to a mighty 3,300m. Bolstered by the most snow cannons per hectare in Europe, it's an exceptionally snow-sure choice for a family getaway.

We were staying in the Timberlodge, a contemporary alpine hotel with a large panoramic swimming pool in the heart of what is a small laid-back village, oozing charm and authenticity while offering great value for money. So it seemed a good place to try 'Snowga', yoga in the snow, on the hotel terrace overlooking the valley.

Carrying on the relaxed vibe we also did a sunset walk to Pré Reynaud, for a glass of wine and hunk of Beaufort cheese as we watched the sun set over the ravine. Though the favourite family après activity had to be the biathlon-style laser target shooting, set up at the foot of the nursery slopes.

BOOK IT: From £197 per person per night for a seven night stay at Timberlodge (four sharing a family room, room only). timberlodge.fr BA return flights from £101 (Heathrow to Lyon). For more information about Isère resorts, visit alpes-isere.com



« 100 YEARS YOUNG

Celebrating its centenary this year, Hotel Gardena Grödnerhof is still owned by the same family, with its Michelin-starred restaurant, the Anna Stuben, named after the current owner's grandmother and the original chef of the hotel. Ortisei is something of a hidden gem to British visitors, most of whom head for neighbouring Val Gardena, but Ortisei is second only to Cortina for pedestrianised Dolomiti village charm, and the Gardena is the Grande Dame di Villaggio.

This being the South Tyrol, any self-respecting five-star hotel has to seriously overdeliver on the spa, and the Gardena is no exception. A separate building linked to the hotel, the spa spans two floors with multiple organic, bark-lined saunas, relaxation rooms, cold plunge and infinity edge outdoor hot tub, as well as a ladies-only sauna.

Kids will love the large black slate swimming pool, complete with underwater tunes, as well as the play land, where they can play 3D interactive video games, try out the climbing treadmill or do arts and crafts.

The hotel's timeless style and grace is epitomised by the seamless Italian service. The restaurant staff are so attentive and friendly, without ever overstepping the mark, and there are three different and interchangeable six-course menus to choose from every evening. Pretty much spot on as the Gardena turns 100.

BOOK IT: From €360 (for two sharing) on a B&B basis. gardena.it

MOVING ON UP »

Nestling at the base of the totemic Sassongher mountain in Corvara, home to some of the best views in the Dolomites, the new Movi Family Apart-Hotel is aimed squarely at families. Blending form and function with cosy comfort, the 33 apartments are beautifully thought through, with dedicated lobby space for outdoor gear and open-plan kitchen living areas with pine banquette seating softened by rugs, throws and furnishings in earthy mossy tones.

The apartments, all of which have two bedrooms plus the option of a fifth bed, may not be huge but every space is perfectly considered. The kids rooms are cosy, with wallpaper of misty hand painted pine trees and iconic owl wall lights above the beds. The hotel offers an excellent breakfast, complete with kids' organic tea bags, but evening meals are either DIY or ordered in from three local restaurants. There's also Salvan, a fantastic and great value pizza place, right next door.

Kids will love the waterworld pool area, spanning two floors and coming with micro water slides, a splash zone and a family sauna. The excellent kids club, with soft play, interactive iWall gaming and climbing wall, is open and supervised from 9am to 10pm, so you can find time to relax in the darkly cocooning adult spa, with its large relaxation room, two saunas, steam and hot tub.

BOOK IT: From £4,140 per week (for a family of four) on a B&B basis, including flights and transfers. skisolutions.com

PHOTOS: UNSPLASH



PISTE OFF

Take a walk on the wilder side with these off-the-beaten-track heli-skiing adventures



FUN ON THE FARM

Up for a real adventure? Retreat to the remotest valleys of Iceland for exhilarating heli-skiing, says *Felix Milns*

There is nothing quite like crouching down on top of a beautifully remote peak and watching the helicopter soar away, with the noise of the rotors thundering in your ears. Especially when that summit is part of the Troll peninsula in the remote north of Iceland, with distant views of saline fjords.

The heli touches down for the least amount of time possible on drop-off, just allowing time for your guide to unload the skis and skiers to dismount into a 'heli-huddle'. Then the belly of the heli rises majestically above you in a flurry of fresh snowflakes. The rest is silence, and you stand rubbing your eyes and looking down a pristine valley of snow, the sense of anticipation second to none.

And the views were quite unlike any I have seen before. As we soared high above the summits it seemed like a Norse god had taken a giant scythe to the mountaintops, decapitating them all to leave a series of flat-topped mountains that run down into the sea. The mountains in the north are glacial, not volcanic, with the folds of the many valleys eroded from the old sea bed.

Skiing the flat-tops is just as rare a treat. This is not a place for waist deep pow – save that for Japan or deepest BC – rather, it's all about skiing the cappuccino froth of spring snow, where the top few centimetres of snowpack soften like butter. It means it's accessible for intermediate skiers. Levi, our deadpan Canadian guide, took us for run after run of beautifully creamy 'corn' snow as we followed the sun round to the north faces and steeper terrain.

It takes real commitment to get to Deplar Farm. After flying to Reykjavik you transfer across town to the domestic terminal. Then it's



(Above) Felix makes tracks in Iceland; Deplar Farm, a remote hotel in the heart of the country



an internal flight north and a two-and-a-half hour drive along epic, ethereal and empty coastal roads that sporadically turn into single lane tunnels. These passages, lit by hanging lanterns every 39 steps or so, feel like a dwarfine palace and only add to the sense of awe and wonder that is at the heart of Icelandic adventure.

Yet it is this very remoteness of Deplar that makes it so special and unique. At 66 degrees north this is one of the world's top hotels for experiential adventure. In the summer, the lure is fly fishing, horseback riding, hiking and kayaking. Come winter it is all about heli skiing and the northern lights. The heli season runs from mid-March to early June, and there are over 100 landing points, many of which have multiple descents. And with the private helicopters based at the lodge it is about as exclusive as it gets.

This being Iceland, though, you are always at the mercy of the weather. For the first two days a thick pea-souper hung over the valley, making flight impossible. It did not matter – rolling with the weather is very much in the Icelandic DNA, and down days here are just as spectacular as the bluebirds. For a start, the lodge itself is absolutely stunning. Clad in black timber with a grass-eaved roof, it appears to have grown out of the landscape.

I spent my first afternoon in the spa and gym, alternating between sauna and ice-cold plunge pool. Wim Hof would approve.

Floor to ceiling windows frame the surrounding peaks while effortlessly stylish interiors feature local stone and driftwood. It's possibly the coolest and most luxurious 'farm' in the world. Quite apart from the landscape and the adventure, all the staff here are so personable that you feel more like a guest in a private home.

The skies had not cleared on day two, so we drove over to the next valley to ride some Icelandic horses, famous for their shaggy hair and peculiar gait, the tölt, halfway between a trot and a fast walk. One of the oldest purebred horses in the world, Vikings are thought to have brought them over 1100 years ago. It's a perfect way (and pace) to explore the frozen waterfalls and barren landscape.

Then, finally, the skies dawned clear and we were ready for an epic day of heli. After close to fifteen runs we heli'd down to Ghost Farm, a one bed outpost of Deplar where honeymooners can spend a romantic night alone, and heli skiers drop in for lunch. Food is excellent, and after a typically great lunch followed by a spot of axe-throwing, we were back in the bird for a final couple of runs before heading back to the farmhouse for ice baths, pool, table tennis and shuffleboard. Quite simply out of this world.

BOOK IT: Rates at Deplar Farm start from \$3,560 pp per night, inclusive of full board, house alcohol and customised adventure itineraries, plus heli-skiing and airport transfers to/from Akureyri. elevenexperience.com



The northern lights shine over Deplar Farm



Deplar Farm has its own helicopters, for a truly private heli-skiing experience





ON THE ROAD

Annabel Illingworth takes a road trip through British Columbia in search of thrills and (hopefully) no spills

Skiing and champagne. Wonderfully evocative words that conjure up happy memories for so many of us. Taking the dream to the next level, British Columbia puts a whole new spin on things, for the Canadian territory is the home of champagne powder: wonderfully light and fluffy snow that's as dry as the best fizz.

In the 1960s, Austrian mountaineer and ski guide Hans Gmoser set up the very first heli-skiing operation out of an abandoned lumber camp in the Bugaboos range and ended up making history. Canadian Mountain Holidays (CMH) Heli-Skiing now operates in 11 locations throughout the Columbia Mountains, which run parallel to the Rockies, with three million acres of terrain – a third the size of Switzerland.

It's arguably a rite of passage to ski with CMH. However, up until recently, skiing with them came with a caveat – stump up for one of the luxury remote private lodges, commit to a full week of drops and accept down days due to poor weather as par for the course. It's been the preserve of incredibly good, incredibly fit skiers.

With their latest acquisition of territory in Purcell, however, the bar has just been lowered enough to appeal to a wider range of skiers and budgets, making finding fresh tracks in BC a degree more accessible. Based out of Golden, CMH Purcell offers daytrips for those keen to dip



FROM TOP: Waiting for the helicopter at the end of a run; landing in Purcell; cosy Home Lodge, just outside Golden, BC



a toe into heliskiing, with around eight to ten drops a day covering 3,000 vertical metres. There's the added benefit of being able to choose one's accommodation and schedule, so any trip can be much more tailor-made.

With that in mind and having never been to Canada, I put together my dream ski road trip with the expert help of Charlie Brooksbank from Pure Powder, whose family business has long represented CMH in the UK: a couple of days warming up and shaking off jet lag in Banff and Lake Louise, three days' heliskiing and then on to the steeps of Kicking Horse and Revelstoke.

Banff was close enough to Calgary airport that I could drive there and be on the slopes the next morning. Dazed and confused with the time change, the SnowHost orientation tour in Sunshine Village proved a remarkably good recommendation. As was the Mad Trappers saloon bar for lunch, which set the cultural tone with Coors beer on tap, ice hockey on television screens and vintage photos of pelt hunters.

Driving onwards, along Highway 1 from Banff to Lake Louise, the jagged mountains covered in pine forests loomed majestically to either side. Arriving at the cozy Post Hotel & Spa, a fire was roaring and a stuffed moose gazed down from above the mantel. Well rested the next day, this time the Ski Friends showed me around – a friendly service set up by the wives of the ski patrol in days gone by.

The sun-softened moguls on the back bowl were remarkably pleasant, as was the pace of the loop around the various hills – just the right warm up without overdoing it. Purcell was going to need all the energy stores I could muster! My next stop felt familiar, with a fold of Highland cattle grazing outside Home Lodge, set in the hills outside Golden. As I sank into the hot tub, a herd of mule deer wandered past completely oblivious to my presence, making a beeline towards the fresh hay in the snow. Après ski proved a relaxed affair – flop on the sofa or catch some live music in the local craft brewery.

The heli-skiing days flew by, with two small groups of us taking turns to jump in and out on a constant rotation. The glaciers were my comfort zone, with endless fresh tracks. The other half was tree skiing, where



Swooshing down a slope in Banff; Moose Hotel in Banff; al-fresco art in Revelstoke



you can fall down the hollows around the trunks if you turn too close. Groups buddy up in pairs and loudly whoop or yodel to each other whilst dodging the trees, signalling all is well.

I mentioned to guide Randy that it was my first real tree experience and felt in good hands. Also a lumberjack, he explained how the trees are thinned each summer to provide adequate spacing for skiers, while also reducing wildfires and encouraging lichen to grow, a key food source for the endangered mountain caribou. This deep connection with nature mirrors how diligently CMH works with government scientists and First Nations communities, tracking animals, protecting biodiversity, measuring the snow conditions for a national database and helping create rural job opportunities.

Above Golden, an orphaned grizzly bear called Boo is the star of the show at Kicking Horse Resort, whose refuge is almost as popular as the steep chutes and gullies. Also known for its steep powder runs, Revelstoke draws the hip and adventure-loving crowd. The redbrick railroad town and slopes are dotted with colourful artworks, such as the Masterpiste Gallery by the Revelstoke Outdoor Art Movement, a playful open-air gallery to amuse skiers amongst the trees.

I went to BC looking for something different and it delivered in spades. One day I might easily be tempted to do the whole remote lodge thing, although I loved the sense of adventure and discovery of all the different resorts. The mid-west rail town vibe coupled with the awesome national parks, kind souls and sublime indigenous art offered a subtle yet powerful thrill I didn't quite see coming.

BOOK IT: Annabel was a guest of Pure Powder and CMH. Pure Powder, established in 1978, is the exclusive representative for CMH in the UK. From CAD\$2,115 plus tax. purepowder.com/cmh-purcell ■



TOP TIPS

1 CMH Purcell has a comfortable basecamp lodge for less eager companions to relax by the fire.

2 Mountain Galleries at Fairmont Lake Louise, a specialist in local talent and First Nations art from the coast and plains, including masks and sculptures.

3 For cultural heritage, the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies in Banff.



HIDDEN SIDE OF THE 3 VALLEYS

Thirty years down the line, Méribel is still a haven for partygoers and plongeurs, says *Felix Milns*

In December 1992, I set out to Méribel as a precocious 18-year-old to work my first winter season. Three decades down the line, myself and four now lifelong friends revisited to celebrate our 30-year anniversary. Gone but not forgotten were our jobs of *plongeurs* – washing up raclette and fondue sets – chalet boys and general dogs' bodies, but the memories of that halcyon season were still to be found in every glorious corner of Méribel.

While many ski resorts have radically transformed in the last 30 years, Méribel is more of a classic case of 'plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose'. Yes – the town has grown, but all very much in the style laid out by Méribel's pioneering forefather, Peter Lindsay. Unquestionably the reason why the resort remains so popular with British visitors, Lindsay first discovered Méribel before WWII, returning to the area immediately after the war to set up the original lift company and design a masterplan for its development, which insisted on all buildings being stone and timber clad with sloping slate roofs.

Rob Smart is still on the radio, Ronnie's remains one of the top après spots in the French Alps, and, after a 60-year run, Chez Kiki's has just reopened as Fifi's, the next generation of family rebooting the famous steakhouse as an Italian brasserie. Toffee vodka in Le Pub remains a right of passage.

Indeed, the night we arrived, retro sustainable skiwear brand OOSC Clothing (specialising in bright onesies made from fully recyclable materials) was sponsoring the party at Le Pub, so it was not long before we ended up on the dancefloor in watermelon neon



Trying out the icy water
at the Lac du Lou refuge

PHOTOS: UNSPLASH

suits, a strong look for one-time *saisonniers* approaching 50.

Yet with age had come a modicum of wisdom, so we managed to swerve the late-night Sully's stop off (previously an outpost of Dick's Tea Bar) as we had a rendez-vous with Hervé from Méribel Alpine Guides in the morning. There is nowhere quite like the Three Valleys for the sheer extent of off-piste terrain. The world's biggest lift-linked ski area has just as much allure away from the pistes and we were celebrating with two days of off-piste guiding and an overnight stay in a remote mountain refuge.

We had timed it well with fresh snowfall and, once we were fully kitted up with touring skis, avalanche transceivers and safety gear, we made our way to the head of the Méribel valley and the Côte Brune chair, the launchpad for some of our favourite off-piste runs as 18-year-olds. Yet the beauty of having a guide is that he will always find you somewhere new, and we kicked off with some tight steep turns down the 'speedball gulleys', a series of chutes we had always looked at but never braved.

We were soon dropping into Val Thorens and riding the cable car to the summit of Cime de Caron, at 3,193m the highest point in the Three Valleys. From here we traversed along a ridge then strapped our skins to our skis for a 90-minute climb up the aptly named Mont du Chat (with two peaks like cat ears), leaving the main ski area behind us in favour of an entire hidden valley of pristine powder. This is the beauty of lift-accessed ski touring: a relatively short skin either in or out opens up sensational terrain, and we were soon lapping up late March powder turns on our way down to the Lac du Lou refuge and the adjacent frozen lake.

With hot showers, smaller dormitories (sleeping six per room) and a reputation for great food, the refuge is renowned as the top spot for on-mountain overnighting in the Three Valleys. We arrived just before the late afternoon sun dipped behind the distant peak, and the prospect of a hot shower, a real luxury in the world of mountain refuges, inspired several of us to take an ice-cold plunge into the small unfrozen end of the lake. It was the coldest water I have ever experienced, unsurprising given we were at 2,000m and surrounded by ice and snow, but the adrenaline rush of the icy needles biting into your skin was indescribable. I am not sure my 18-year-old self would have got his kicks this way, but 30 years on it was a fitting end to an incredible day. ■



Felix and his friends explore the off-piste slopes of the Three Valleys