

# ABOVE AND BEYOND

Whether you're after the adrenaline rush of heli-skiing or the indulgence of a pool deck with mountain views, these fab five have it covered

BY GABRIELLA LE BRETON

## EL LODGE, SIERRA NEVADA, SPAIN *Sun, ski and spa*

High in Spain's Sierra Nevada mountains, El Lodge rose like a phoenix from the flames this December: after a devastating fire in 2014, the boutique hotel has now been entirely rebuilt.

Sierra Nevada's sole luxury ski-in/ski-out option – an Alpine-style chalet in caramel-hued Finnish timber – has two restaurants and a couple of bars; the serene spa includes an outdoor pool, sauna, steam baths and a range of specialist therapies; there's a well-stocked ski shop; and the bar is as lively as you would expect from a Marbella Club property. And all this in a hotel with just 20 suites and rooms – and which, if you want to arrange the fiesta to end all fiestas, you can book in its entirety.

When you're not soaking up the sunshine, live music and organic caviar de Riofrio on El Lodge's ever-popular Terrace (where chefs whipping up gigantic paellas is not to be missed), you can cosy up inside and admire designer Andrew Martin's contemporary interiors: all vintage ski posters, antler chandeliers and pony-skin chairs. And while the two-bedroom penthouse Imperial Suite is definitely the most palatial pad, there's something irresistible about the bijou Pool Corner Suite, with uninterrupted mountain views from its secluded outdoor Jacuzzi.

About those views... Sierra Nevada is the southernmost ski area in continental Europe

(further south even than Athens). On a clear day, you can see the terracotta smudge of Granada, just 30 minutes by car past tumble-down fincas, while the Mediterranean's Costa Tropical is only around 60 miles away.

The Med should be put on hold, however, given the 105km of pistes on El Lodge's doorstep. Most are gentle red and blue runs, but there are some thigh-busting blacks, and six cracking off-piste routes that take you straight back to El Lodge – ready for a well-earned cerveza and another opportunity to marvel at those mindblowing vistas.

**From €400 per night bed and breakfast, based on two sharing; [ellodge.com](http://ellodge.com)**



## CHALET MONT BLANC, MEGÈVE, FRANCE

*Unrestrained luxury*

Back in 1914, Baroness Noémie de Rothschild determined to get her aristocratic pals on board to pluck the medieval Savoyard village of Megève out of obscurity. Supporting the launch of ski lifts, plush hotels and restaurants, she was instrumental in morphing the sleepy farming community into a glamorous winter playground that, by the 1950s, Jean Cocteau had nicknamed "Paris' 21st Arrondissement".

Today, the undulating pastures and wooded slopes continue to provide make-you-look-like-a-pro slopes, and the Baroness' legacy lives on, with Megève still the preferred destination for much of the European jet set. Yet she surely couldn't have imagined a winter bolt hole on the scale of Chalet Mont Blanc, which, even in a town where property prices rival those of Paris' Left Bank, is set to be a game-changer.

Mont Blanc – actually two conjoined chalets in pale timber and stone – embodies both contemporary chalet design and ultra luxury. At the heart of the master chalet, a sleek bar is accessed via a glass-and-chrome staircase winding up from the double-height sitting and

dining room, with floor-to-ceiling windows spanning all three storeys. In addition to six suitably glamorous en-suite bedrooms, there's a delightful room designed to sleep four children – who also get their own play room. And the grown-ups have been well catered for too, with indoor and outdoor pools, an extensive gym, and a spa including a steam room, sauna and massage room. There's also a home cinema and a dangerously well-stocked wine cellar.

Located on Megève's quieter, western side, adjacent to the piste flanking the Jaillet lift, the chalet – regularly bathed in evening sunshine – offers unbroken views over the town from the sitting room and heated outdoor seating area. A helipad is one route in; alternatively, there's spacious underground parking – where your car can be given a good clean while it's parked up. And with seven members of staff, your every need is instantly attended to, whether it's whizzing you off to the best snow or keeping your Champagne topped up. **Seven nights from €145,000, including three chalet hosts, a private chef and butler, and in-resort transport; [oxfordski.com](http://oxfordski.com)**





## BIGHORN LODGE, REVELSTOKE, CANADA

*Pristine powder*

It takes dedication to reach Revelstoke – or “Revy” as it’s known by the locals. It’s 95 miles to the nearest airport, Kelowna, while Calgary is a 250-mile drive away, over lakes and along twisting Kootenays Rockies passes which puncture the mountains. But the commitment it takes to journey to one of the world’s snowiest places – annual snowfall of around 50ft – is handsomely rewarded by more than 3,000 acres of marked ski terrain, North America’s highest lift-serviced drop (5,620ft), and a sense of isolation and wilderness rare even for Canada. What really sets Revy apart, though, is half a million acres of some of the world’s finest and most accessible heli-skiing. And many guests staying at Bighorn Lodge – the only lodge in Revelstoke with its own helipad – simply skip the ski passes and fly straight into the back country.

Bighorn (named after the North American breed of sheep) sleeps 16 in unabashed luxury. At its heart is the triple-height Great Room, offering dramatic views of the Monashees. Then there’s a private cinema, bar and pool room, vast outdoor hot tub, indoor exercise

pool, extensive wellness area, and a teppanyaki grill – where you can watch talented chef Peter Hughes work his magic with Kobe beef.

Hughes’ breakfasts are similarly amazing, and once suitably fortified, you’ll be ready to start your heli-ski adventure. Ease on your warmed boots, step out of the door into your sleek AStar helicopter, and before long, with a dedicated guide, you’ll be revelling in the deep feather-light virgin snow, interrupted only by lunch in a pristine forest clearing or remote glacial valley. Of course, you can spend your days in Revelstoke Mountain Resort instead, skiing down the 8,058ft-high Mt Mackenzie in open powder bowls, down steep drops, through glades and along satisfyingly extensive pistes (the longest is nine and a half miles). Whether you head skywards or stay earthbound, the high-octane action is never far away.

**Seven nights from 75,000CAD based on 16 sharing, including Champagne reception on arrival and in-resort transport; heli-skiing guideline price of 1,700CAD per person per day; bighornrevelstoke.com**



## HAUS ALPINA, KLOSTERS, SWITZERLAND

*Secluded Swiss sophistication*

For all its decades of patronage by global and silver-screen royalty, the quintessentially Swiss town of Klosters remains refreshingly humble. It’s totally bereft of five-star properties, and arguably the most coveted overnight lodging is the three-star Chesa Grischuna which, since 1938, has welcomed guests from Greta Garbo to Renée Zellweger. It’s fitting, therefore, that its latest luxury property is secreted away.

Haus Alpina has been created by Chrissie Rucker (founder of The White Company) and her husband, menswear mogul Nick Wheeler. Unsurprisingly, the apartment is stuffed to its timber rafters with White Company products, from scented candles to fluffy bathrobes and

down duvets with a cream-and-white décor – the serene result of a collaboration between Rucker and interior designer Nicky Dobree.

The space in Haus Alpina is exceptional. Alongside two double-height lounges and a chilled-out Swiss *stübli* (a cosy dining area) adjacent to a roaring fire, there are five spacious double bedrooms and a palatial master suite. As for the trappings of today’s ultra-luxury chalets – spa, gym, pool, cinema – well, that’s not Haus Alpina’s style. The owners’ idea of perfect après ski is mulling over the day’s exploits by the fire. If you do, however, hanker after a massage or a horse-drawn sleigh ride, all it takes is a quick

word to the down-to-earth British hosts, chef Jimmy McNamara and Tracey Gill.

Apart from the anonymity offered by Klosters, there’s another very good reason that it’s the choice of the rich and famous. A staggering 320km of pistes are spread across the six mountains in the shared Davos/Klosters ski area, supplemented by vast and varied off-piste. So, if you’re serious about skiing and shy away from excessive glitz, Haus Alpina could be for you. Especially if you love drifting around on a lavender-scented cloud.

**Seven nights from £26,000 based on 12 sharing, including Champagne reception on arrival; haus-alpina-klosters.com ▶**





**BAITA 1697, PATTEMOUCHE, ITALY**  
*Italian tradition*

It's hard not to fall under the spell of Italy's cockle-warming cuisine, innate sense of style and infectious commitment to *la dolce vita*. However, with a few notable exceptions (Cortina d'Ampezzo, Courmayeur, Alta Badia), style and luxury are words only rarely applied to Italian ski towns, where there can be a certain reticence to embrace the luxury-chalet phenomenon enveloping France, Switzerland and, more recently, Austria.

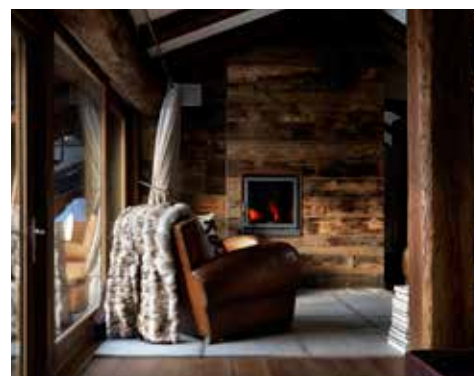
Happily for skiers who love the finer things and Italy in equal measure, a revolution is taking place. Baita 1697 – the labour of love of interior designer Lucie McCullough – is a 17th-century farmhouse in Pattemouche (a sleepy medieval hamlet in the Piedmont) that has been sensitively restored from a derelict *baita* (mountain hut) into a sumptuous six-bedroom retreat.

Using fluffy sheepskins, natural rugs and subtle lighting to soften the original exposed stone walls, McCullough has created a cosy living and dining area in the vaulted stables. Upstairs, exposed timber beams, a woodburner and classic leather

armchairs have magicked the old hay loft into a chic rustic hangout – with a wooden hot tub outside on the terrace. The bedrooms, meanwhile, blend up-to-the-minute features like wrap-around fires and “rain” showers with treasures bagged by McCullough during her travels – a reclaimed copper bathtub in one room; hand-spun Mongolian carpets and Burmese bronze bowls in another.

Despite its diminutive size, Pattemouche is home to a pizza restaurant voted Italy's best (in 2008), an Olympic cross-country ski circuit and a helipad. Baita 1697, meanwhile, is just a short stroll from the scenic *parco naturale della Val Troncea*, while across the road a cable car will whisk you into the sprawling Milky Way ski area. There, 400km of lift-linked, mainly beginner and intermediate pistes can take you all the way to Montgenèvre in France (and back again). But staying closer to home has benefits too: the local chairlift opens up 50km of untouched tree-lined slopes and glades directly above the village.

**Seven nights from €16,600 based on 10 sharing; [baita1697.com](http://baita1697.com)**



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