

What to wear, what to buy - and what not to!



Gabriella Le Breton with a Top 10 list of equipment advice for first-time skiers

Products for beginners



Launching yourself into the world of skiing and snowboarding for the first time is an exciting yet potentially expensive endeavour. There's the travel, accommodation, lift pass, lessons, après-ski beers... And that's without buying all the kit a new sport invariably requires. So it's understandable to be wary of splurging half your monthly salary on an ABS rescue backpack and carbon fibre ski poles that might well end up languishing in the loft if you don't fall in love with the sport. And, frankly, we'd advise against it (unless you've just won the lottery).

On the flip side, you're more likely to enjoy your introduction to the mountains, and develop a life-long passion for skiing and riding if you're warm, dry and comfortable. Fortunately, with the quality of rental equipment improving all the time, encompassing not only skis and boards but comfy boots, helmets and clothing, your shopping list needn't be too daunting. We've whittled it down to just 10 good-quality, well priced essentials which, with a few exceptions, you'll be able to use back home as well as on the slopes. If recent British winters are a sign of those to come, decent thermals and a waterproof jacket are unlikely to hang unwanted in your wardrobe for long.



TOP TIP #1

If you have the patience to flick through the racks of your local **TK Maxx** (www.tkmaxx.com) store early in the season, you can find some real bargains. At the time of going to press, we found Gore-Tex jackets from the excellent Swedish brand Haglöfs for under £100 (they usually retail for around £300), and Icebreaker merino thermals from £15 (usually about £50). If you prefer shopping from your sofa, there are also bargains in the more limited selection of ski and board equipment available online.



TOP TIP #2

If you're travelling in a group of 20 or more, consider giving the **Pre-Fit Delivery** team (www.prefitdelivery.com; 01367 801000) a call. A few weeks before your holiday, they'll bring a mobile shop to you and fit your group with skis, boards, boots, jackets, gloves, helmets - you name it. They'll deliver your clothing to you before your trip and whisk the technical kit off to the Alps, depositing it in your chalet or hotel prior to your arrival. At the end of your trip, Pre-Fit will pick up the heavy kit, leaving you to travel home in your warm clothing. The really clever bit? If you've become inseparable from your ski gear, you can buy it at a discounted price when you get home. ►



Salomon helmet

In my opinion, a comfortable helmet is as essential a piece of equipment as your ski or board. You can rent helmets in resort, but the selection can be limited and having your own ensures a better fit. This in turn offers improved safety. It can take a while to get used to wearing a helmet, so the more comfortable it is, the less distracting it will be. Cue Salomon's Custom Air Fit technology: the inside of the helmet is lined with pockets you fill with air, using a thumb-sized blister pump. This ensures a perfect custom fit it each time you wear it. Not only does the system ensure the helmet sits snugly but the closer fit provides better protection. www.salomon.com; 020 7078 3528

Goggles

It's essential that you invest in a good pair of goggles: the glare of the sun at altitude, and reflection off the snow, can cause irreparable damage to your eyes. Some brands will fit you better than others, so head for Ellis Brigham, which stocks a wide choice, and try plenty of them on. Most of the staff spend time on the slopes putting kit to the test, so they can offer you first-hand advice rather than sales patter. Goggles offer more complete eye protection than sunglasses, so buying a pair with interchangeable lenses like the Dragon APXs, giving you one lens for sunny days and another for bad visibility days, might be expensive but is worth it. And, if you've bought a helmet, make sure you try the goggles on with it to ensure a good fit. www.ellisbrigham.co.uk; 0844 372 1010



66°North Snæfell Jacket

A jacket that passes muster with the Icelandic national rescue service certainly gets our approval. 66°North started life developing technical equipment for off-shore fisherman before creating more general outerwear capable of withstanding Iceland's brutal winter conditions. The Snæfell jacket is a durable hard shell, which the Icelandic rescue services use as standard issue and won the ISPO 2011 award for technical innovation. To quote the ISPO jury: "Based on the highly technical fabric Polartec® NeoShell®, the Snæfell Jacket convinces through an outstanding performance for a broad range of use. Perfect construction and workmanship as well as very nice details make the jacket a perfect high-end concept, which can be used by a broad target group of active outdoor sportsmen." Men's Snæfell jacket available at Blacks (www.blacks.co.uk; 0844 257 2078). Women's Snæfell jacket available online (www.66north.com; 00 354 535 6600).



Helly Hansen base layers

Helly Hansen is one of the original and best base-layer manufacturers, with light, breathable materials that keep you warm and dry, drawing perspiration away from your body. They also look great, so you'll feel good about stripping down to your thermals at the après-ski bar and get plenty of wear out of them back home. There's a wide selection of fabrics, from the lightweight HH Dry layers to the HH Warm and HH Freeze range, which incorporate an inner Lifa® fibre layer to keep you dry, and an outer layer of merino wool for additional warmth.

Osprey Packs Rucksack

A rucksack isn't just handy for stashing your wallet, camera and phone while you're skiing, it's highly recommended to carry some water, an extra warm layer, sunscreen, sunglasses and a hat. Weather conditions can change within minutes up in the mountains, so it's always advisable to be as well prepared as possible. The new Osprey Packs Reverb Series (available in 10 litre and 18 litre capacities) have been developed specifically with a slim, ergonomic shape that makes them comfortable to wear on chairlifts. Constructed using super durable high-density nylon, the packs feature plenty of zippered pockets as well as a microfleece-lined goggles pocket and are hydration-reservoir compatible. As you progress to off-piste riding, you'll find the Reverb even more useful, with a quick-access avalanche safety pocket (a separate compartment for your shovel and probe) and convenient ski and board carrying solutions. www.ospreypacks.com; 01202 413920





Uniglo ultra-light down jacket

£60

For cold days, pair the Snæfell jacket with an affordable, ultra-light down jacket from Uniglo. Packed with toasty warm down yet weighing in at just 206 grams, these jackets come in a small pouch, making them easy to stash in your suitcase or in your rucksack as an extra layer while you're on the slopes. It's also ideal for chilly days back home.



From £35

Surfdome.com

Dakine Gloves & Mittens

There's a colossal selection of gloves and mittens out there - leather ones, self-heating ones, custom-fit ones and even gloves which claim to improve your

performance by stimulating your nerve centres to increase the flow of neurological information to your brain! Dakine has a wide range for men and women to suit most budgets. Our favourite is the Skyline mitten, which has a removable, touch-screen compatible fleece glove-liner and side zipper, enabling you to check your phone or take a photo without freezing your fingers off. Snowboarders should consider the Nova Wristguard gloves, which have removable, rigid-nylon supports on the backs of the each hand and on the palm.

www.dakine.com

Sunpocket sunglasses

We're big fans of the retro look, neat size and appealing price of Sunpockets: foldable sunglasses rooted in ski and surf culture, which first made their mark in the Alps in the 1970s. Relaunched in 2011, Sunpockets are better than ever, with an extensive range of bright colours, funky shapes and polycarbonate lenses, which are supposedly unbreakable (true, in our experience). Each pair comes with a handy, palm-sized hard case, but you can buy a neoprene case for just £7 or splash out on a leather one (£30). Simply tuck them into your pocket or backpack and unfold them for lazy lunches and après-ski dancing on sunny terraces. www.sunpocketoriginal.com



£50



From £20

Falke socks

Happy feet make for happy skiers and riders, so quality socks are crucial for a good day on the hill. Fortunately, the German company Falke knows a thing or two about keeping toes toasty and dry, having been in the wool and hosiery business since 1895. Falke's ski and snowboard-specific socks come in light, medium and thick volume and are padded at key points to reduce pressure on your shins, ankles and heels. The SK1 Warm socks even have felted soles to provide extra protection on particularly cold days. Luxury lovers will fall for the charms of the SK2 Cashmere socks. www.falke.com; 0049 2225 926 176

Perfect Moment trousers

£215

When Thierry Donard, the legendary French extreme skier and film maker, struggled to find clothing for the athletes in his films that was technical enough to withstand extreme conditions yet looked great on camera, he developed his own brand: Perfect Moment. The kit is all about blending style and substance, with stand-out patterns, relaxed fits and technical details. The low-hanging, cargo-style Imok pants (men's and women's) look every inch freestyle chic but have a full-rise waistband to stop snow getting in, fully taped seams, reinforced inner legs, articulated knees, ventilator zips and low-volume insulation throughout. It's unlikely you'll be using your ski pants off the slopes, so why not have some fun with them? Go for bright green, blue or, our favourite, the 'Frozen Moment' polar bear print. www.perfectmoment.com; 07730 595371



Sorel boots



From £145

Until you're officially diagnosed with the ski/board bug, it's not really worth splashing out on your own boots - until you've decided you really are "hooked", when it really IS worth it. But for beginners, they're expensive, bulky to carry around and you can rent good ones easily. However, it is worth getting a pair of warm, rubber soled winter boots for walking in and around the resort - and back in the UK judging by recent winters. The Canadian brand Sorel has been crafting hard-wearing winter boots since 1962, successfully combining functionality with fashion and establishing itself as the footwear of choice for ski town locals across North America and the Alps. Try the seam-sealed, waterproof 1964 Premium boot for men (£145) and fashionable Joan of Arctic for women (£160). www.sorelfootwear.co.uk; 0808 234 0228