

## SKI SALES SPIKE AS FRANCE SIGNALS END OF TRAVEL BAN



The French government has announced that fully vaccinated Britons will be **permitted to enter the country for holidays from Friday (14 January)** – lifting the ban that has been in place since 18 December due to the spread of the Omicron variant.

Chris Logan, managing director of Crystal Ski Holidays, said: “Like the rest of the ski community I’m delighted we’ll be able to hit the slopes in France once again. With the relaxation of UK testing and the Alps open to the UK again I’m feeling really optimistic.

“We’ve seen a steady increase in search and bookings in the last two weeks. Bookings to France doubled yesterday (12 January), even before the announcement, and we would expect to see another very positive uptick now it’s official. The outlook is good, there are great deals available, so now is the time to book.”

Crystal plans to restart its ski holidays to France on 22 January. While Jet2.com has also announced that it will resume ski flights to the French gateways of Lyon, Chambéry and Grenoble from 22 January.

Jet2.com added that it had already seen an “immediate” surge in searches and bookings for ski flights to France following the announcement by the French government.

Steve Heapy, chief executive of Jet2.com and Jet2holidays, said: “The spike in bookings for ski flights has been both sharp and immediate.

“The snow conditions in the French Alps are said to be excellent, meaning our customers are jumping at the chance to get back on the slopes.”

The lifting of France’s travel ban has “saved the season”, added Estelle Giraudeau, Club Med’s managing director, UK & Northern Europe.

“After two years away from the slopes, Brits are desperate to get back to France and some of the most loved ski domains in Europe – and this is the final barrier to be removed,” said Giraudeau.

“Since the announcement to lift the ban was made this morning, Club Med has seen a 60% increase in web traffic and there has also been a 650% increase on Google Trends today for ‘French travel restrictions’.”

Some in the industry admitted that the past few days had been difficult, as speculation mounted that French authorities would finally lift the month-long ban on UK holidaymakers.

Diane Palumbo, sales and marketing director at Skiworld and a board member of Seasonal Businesses in Travel (Sbit), told *TTG*: “The last few days have been torture for us and our skiers. So many want to travel and yet leaving the announcement so late made it impossible for many to make the arrangements they needed

“But this is the news we were waiting for and combined with the changes made last weekend by the UK government, travel is far, far more straightforward – and that will unleash the demand that we know is there.”

Some customers who had cancelled their trips to France departing this weekend have been trying to reinstate their bookings, said Joanna Laforge, group commercial director of Ski France.

“We’re really excited to be welcoming people from the UK back to the Alps this weekend, there’s fresh snow, the sun is shining and the conditions are perfect.”

Sister brands Inghams and Esprit Ski will also restart winter sports holidays to France from 22 January.

Joe Ponte, chief executive of the Hotelplan-owned operators, said: “With France being our key Esprit family holiday destination and normally accounting for around a third of Inghams’ winter programme, the French government’s latest update means, finally, the many skiers and snowboarders hoping to enjoy the French slopes with us this winter will be able to do so.”

While Pierre & Vacances said it had “mobilised” its reservations and admin teams to help customers wanting to rebook trips to France departing on Saturday (15 January)

Cathy Rankin, sales director, UK and Ireland, at Groupe Pierre & Vacances, added: “We would also suggest that for those who need a little longer to reorganise their stay, to consider looking at departures on 5 February where there are discounts of up to 20%.”

Andy Sturt, managing director of VIP Ski, said the operator has continued to remain open in its French resorts during the past few weeks.

“The local Covid restrictions – masks in lift queues and bubbles, showing your NHS pass in restaurants – have not proved any hinderance to enjoying a ski holiday,” added Sturt.

“The snow base is excellent, particularly at altitude and the relaxation of UK Covid rules means it is easier than it was before the travel ban.

“We’re positive that there is plenty to look forward to this season and in response to demand will be keeping many of our altitude properties open a week longer than usual to make the most of the snowpack.”