

TRAVEL SECTION OF THE YEAR

The Daily Telegraph

Super savers: the 50 best bargains in travel p.11

TRAVEL

Make the most of summer in the Alps

Hiking, biking, gondola rides, festivals, scenic flights over Mont Blanc... Sarah Baxter finds plenty of reasons to swap the Med for the mountains



Catch your breath, take a break from bike rides at Saalfelden Leogang, in Austria, popular with cyclists

ROBERT KITTEL

Is it all change in the Alps? Skiing has been the big draw for much of the past century: Thomas Cook first offered ski packages in 1908, and most mountain resorts depend on skiing for 75 per cent of their earnings. But with temperatures rising, snow

less reliable and the weather downright strange, winter tourism is a rapidly changing landscape.

To counter this, Alpine resorts are putting more effort into attracting summer travellers – more bike trails, running routes, festivals, quirky family

fun, astro-tourism and wellness breaks. So, is it time to switch our salopettes for shorts and sandals – and take advantage of cooler mountain temperatures as traditional beach spots warm up?

The concept isn't new. The first Alpine tourists, in the 19th century, came in summer for clean air, mountaineering and spectacular views. These have always been a given in the Alps – but today, there are ever-more sophisticated ways of admiring them. You can ride audacious cable cars like the Matterhorn Alpine Crossing (opened in 2023; matterhornalpinecrossing.com), hop on the new gondola to Chamonix's Mer de Glace (chamonix.net), step into the magical new Skyway Monte Bianco Infinity Room in Courmayeur (montebianco.com) or fly over the Mont Blanc Massif in planes with see-through canopies (aerocime.com).

Accommodation options continue to develop, too. Take the Brecon (thebrecon.com), opening in 2024 in the Swiss village of Adelboden, which is aiming to be “more dream home than luxury hotel”. Or chic adults-only Odles Lodge (odleslodge.it), opened in 2023 in Italy's South Tyrol, with an emphasis on style, freedom and privacy. Tour operator Original Travel has reacted to the trend of walkers wanting fancier places to stay – which they have named “bootiquing” – with a new trip in the Dolomites, combining hikes with five-star hotels and a posh refugio-with-wine cellar (five days half-board from £4,975 per person, including flights; originaltravel.co.uk).

The truth is, whether you are after mindfulness, massage and Michelin stars, or hut-to-hut hiking, mountain cheese and old-fashioned Gemütlichkeit, in essence the Alps haven't changed all that much. We might now be offered “forest bathing” excursions or guided wild swims, but it is the trees and tarns themselves, and the abundance of fresh air, space and splendour, that really make this region the perfect summer spot.

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BEST FOR
CLASSIC
ALPS
Kitzbühel, Austria

Self-proclaimed “home of sport and lifestyle”, **Kitzbühel** is your classic summer Alpine resort, a jaw-dropping Tyrolean playground with an activity, adventure, outlet, excursion or eatery for everyone. There are over 1,000km of footpaths here, winding amid the forests, meadows and mountains. There are also more than 800km of bike routes (including the new-last-year Sonnenrast MTB trails), four world-class golf courses, three bathing lakes, the Alpenblumengarten (home to 400-plus native plants), a wealth of wellness options and some top-class restaurants – contemporary-French Les Deux Brasserie is one of the latest openings. Expect events all summer, too, including Pura Vida (July 4-August 22 2024), which sees Thursday evenings filled with yoga, music, food and drinks.

Insider tip: Book a sunrise breakfast trip up the 1,996m Kitzbüheler Horn, which includes traditional brass music and a spread of farmhouse bread, fresh butter and local cheeses.

Nearest airports: Salzburg (1hr 15m), Innsbruck (1hr 20m), Munich (2hr).

How to do it: Inghams (01483 945048; ingham.co.uk) offers a week at Hotel Kaiserhof from £919pp including B&B accommodation, excluding flights. Macs Adventure (01415 303466; macsadventure.com) offers a six-night self-guided Kitzbühel Alpine Trail walk through the Kitzbüheler Alps, from £920pp including B&B accommodation, excluding flights.

kitzbuehel.com/en



▲ Old school: Restaurant S’Pfundldundae

BEST FOR
FAMILIES

Vaujany, France

In little Vaujany, at 1,250m, old farmhouses jostle in a fine natural setting, by a waterfall, facing the Grandes Rousses Massif. But Vaujany also has plenty of mod-cons, including top-notch leisure facilities, making it fantastic for families. Indeed, it is a long-term holder of a “Family Plus” label, with child-friendly offerings ranging from kids clubs to free pram hire. Best is Vaujany’s Collet Centre – renovated last year, and accessible from the village by free petit train, it offers many free activities, from tennis and archery to frisbee golf and pétanque; there’s a pump track for skaters and bikers too. For summer 2024, the resort is offering six new free family activities, including beekeeping, boat-building and graffiti-ing.

Insider tip: Pick up a Vaujany Discovery Card – free for anyone staying overnight, it covers certain activities and offers reduced rates.

Nearest airport: Grenoble (1hr).

How to do it: Summer France (0203 475 4756; summerfrance.co.uk) offers a week at central Hôtel les Cimes, close to Vaujany’s restaurants, shops and cable cars, from £1,185pw in a superior B&B quad (sleeping four), excluding flights.

vaujany.com



▲ Kidding around: Vaujany holds a ‘Family Plus’ label – awarded to child-friendly resorts

BEST FOR
HIGH JINKS

Les Diablerets, Switzerland

Up in the Vaud Alps, the views are pretty special. The resort of Les Diablerets, at 1,200m, gazes right at a rocky massif. And, from Glacier 3000, a scenic cable car ride above the village, you can see the Matterhorn and Mont Blanc. Also at this height you’ll find a taste of winter Alps: explore the glacier on foot, by Snowbus or sledge, and go tobogganing on the Alpine Coaster. Alternatively, test your nerve on the vertiginous Peak Walk, the world’s first suspension footbridge between two summits. Settle your nerves afterwards at Glacier 3000’s restaurant – reopening this summer following a fire in 2022, it has been redesigned by Swiss architect Mario Botta, with a new panoramic terrace.



▲ The view from the Glacier 3000 cable car

Insider tip: Go on a Rando-Raclette. The Tourist Office rents raclette bags (stove and lighting kit, plus cheese, sausage, bread and beers), so you can picnic in the Swiss-est of ways.

Nearest airport: Geneva (2hrs).

How to do it: Family-run Eurotel Victoria Les Diablerets (00 41 24 492 3721; eurotel-victoria.ch) has B&B doubles from £254. Ramble Worldwide (01707 331133; rambleworldwide.co.uk) has a new seven-night guided Les Diablerets trip from £1,899pp half-board, including leisurely walks and flights; July 19, August 7 2024.

alpesvaudoises.ch; glacier3000.ch

BEST FOR
CULTURE

Engelberg, Switzerland

Just 25km south of Lake Lucerne, Engelberg sits pretty in the peaks of central Switzerland, perched 1,000m up in the shadow of 3,239m Mount Titlis. It's easy to access by train, and even easier to get around, with a free bus connecting all the valley stations, plus 500km of hiking trails and the world's first rotating cableway up Titlis itself. Despite being the largest holiday resort in the region, with a distinctly sporty vibe, it's charming too, thanks to its belle époque buildings and Benedictine monastery, founded here in 1120 – explore it on a guided tour or join a cheese-making session in the monastery dairy (chaes-im-kloster.ch). This summer, Engelberg has an additional cultural attraction: Backstage Engelberg (June 21-August 18 2024) will see

40 artists exhibiting in usually private, empty and unseen spaces to create a unique art trail.

Insider tip: Buy Titlis cable car tickets online to avoid queues. Use your Engelberg guest card (available to anyone staying overnight) to get 10 per cent off; holders of a Swiss Travel Pass save 50 per cent.

Nearest airport: Zurich (1hr).

How to do it: The five-star Eienwäldli campsite (00 41 41 637 1949; eien-waeldli.ch) has pitches from around £6.50pppn, doubles in its Sporthotel from £190pn room-only.

engelberg.ch



▲ Oarsome: Engelberg has a 'distinctly sporty vibe' but also a reputation for art and food

BEST FOR
SPORT

Tignes, France

Tignes bills itself as *the* sport and activity resort in the French Alps, with some justification. An official "Terre des Jeux 2024" – a Paris Olympics training camp for various disciplines – it's geared to outdoor exertions. You can do everything here, from cycling, hiking, trail running and rafting, to kayaking, biathlon, water sports and beach volleyball. At the centre of the resort is Tignesspace, a state-of-the-art sport centre, with racket courts, a skate park and climbing wall. Plus, a new 15,000 sq m area of pitches and pétanque courts will open in June. After all that, you may need to head to the Lagon aquatic area for a restorative swim, jacuzzi, steam or massage.

Insider tip: MyTignes passes (€32/€26 adult/child for one week) cover many activities, such as rifle-shooting, tennis and mini-golf. New for 2024, passes also include unlimited access to the funicular up 3,032m Grande Motte.

Nearest airport: Chambéry (2hr), Geneva (2hr 45m).

How to do it: Hacienda-style Ynycio Residence (00 33 4 7910 4915; ynycio.com) is opening in summer for the first time in 2024, with apartments (sleeping 4-8) from £28pppn. Peak Retreats (023 9283 9310; peakretreats.co.uk) offers a week in a two-bed Le Telemark apartment from £1,290, including ferry.

tignes.net



▲ Tignes: play 'the highest golf in Europe'

BEST FOR
NATURAL WELLNESS

Canazei, Italy



▲ 'Natural playground': go trekking in the Val di Fassa and recover with a spa treatment

Tucked in the Val di Fassa, Canazei is a natural playground. It has just become quicker to access, thanks to SkyAlps' new twice-weekly spring/summer Gatwick-Bolzano flights (skyalps.com). Also, from May to October, 35 lifts operate in the valley, whisking hikers up to meadows and mountains – walking options range from family strolls to hut-to-hut Trek-King routes right round the Fassa Dolomites. Road cyclists can try Giro d'Italia climbs or, less strenuous, the Fiemme & Fassa ride along the Avisio River. Canazei is also a wonderful spot for wellness, including yoga, barefoot paths and forest bathing, Ancient Roman-inspired spa-ing at Eghes Wellness (dolaondes.it) or dipping in Trentino's only sulphur spring at QC Terme Dolomiti (qcterme.com).

Insider tip: Try a chunk of Puzzone di Moena, a much-revered semi-hard local cheese that even gets its own festival (September 20-22).

Nearest airport: Bolzano (1hr)

How to do it: Lupo Bianco Bio Hotel (00 39 0462 601330; hotellupobianco.it) has B&B doubles from £365 for three nights. A four-day Dolomiti Trek-King Short Experience (fassa.com) costs from £265pp including half-board refuge accommodation.

fassa.com

BEST FOR
MOUNTAINEERING

Pralognan-la-Vanoise, France

Pralognan-la-Vanoise, below the highest peak in Vanoise National Park, is one of the original homes of mountaineering. Awarded the Terre d'Alpinisme label in 2022 – given to destinations that defend the Unesco-listed Intangible Cultural Heritage of mountaineering – Pralognan continues to draw those who love high places. There are 35 hiking and mountain guides here (guides-pralognan.com). New excursions for 2024 include an icy glacier trip, a hiking tour to the wildest peaks, and à la carte journeys, ranging from two to eight days, sleeping in mountain huts. Of course, you can hit the 250km of hiking trails alone; there are also chances to try climbing, paragliding, mountain-biking, trail running, via ferrata and more.



▲ Explore the glaciers and lakes of Pralognan

Insider tip: Visit for the Fête de l'Alpe et des Guides (August 10-11 2024), a celebration of mountain guiding that includes talks, rope blessings and a parade.

Nearest airport: Chambéry (1hr).

How to do it: Alpine-style Hôtel les Airelles (00 33 4 7908 7032; hotel-les-aireselles.fr) has doubles from £94pn, room-only. Perched at 2,000m, Le Roc de la Pêche refuge (00 33 4 7908 7975; lerocdelapeche.com) offers half-board dorms (£62ppn), doubles (£172pn) and a geodesic stargazing dome (£249pn).

pralognan.com

BEST FOR
BIKING

Saalfelden Leogang, Austria



Lonely Planet named Saalfelden Leogang one of the 10 best travel regions in the world for 2024, on account of its strides towards sustainability and its glut of guided Alpine activities. This Salzburgerland resort is Austria's largest bike area, with over 90km of trails, and a network of lifts and cable cars to take you to them. Come to watch the UCI Mountain Bike World Series (June 7-9 2024), hit Europe's biggest beginner's Bikepark, join a workshop to pick

up riding tips and pedal up on the high plateau. Or plan a relaxed foodie e-bike tour - the region is great for gourmets, with seven restaurants here sharing 14 Gault&Millau toques (Austria's equivalent of Michelin stars), as well as farmers' markets and family stubbe serving creamy cheeses and spicy sausages.

Insider tip: Restore your limbs in the cool lakeside Krallerhof Atmosphere Spa (krallerhof.com), which is

designed to blend into the mountains.

Nearest airport: Salzburg (1hr), Innsbruck (1hr 45m), Munich (2hrs).

How to do it: Stay at a bike-friendly hotel such as Puradies (00 43 6583 8275; puradies.com), which offers a three-night Bike In/Bike Out half-board package from £455pp.

saalfelden-leogang.com

BEST FOR
BLUE THERAPY

Schladming Dachstein, Austria

This Styrian eyrie, easily reachable by train from Salzburg, isn't well known by Britons. And yet it's a stunner: sheer limestone walls, green valleys and countless peaks, including the glaciated 2,700m Dachstein; a new solar-powered mountain station is opening here in 2024, with a panoramic restaurant and new "Stairway to Heaven" viewing platform. Schladming is also known as the Valley of the Thousand Springs, with 300 tarns and 100 waterfalls. You can follow various "water hikes", from the family-friendly Wild Waters path, via 140m-high Riesach Falls, to the route to Caribbean-blue Seekarlsee. There are rivers to raft, canyons to splash through and ponds to swim in - sites like Pürgg natural pool and Putterersee bathing lake are covered by the resort's free Summercard.



Insider tip: Head to Waldhäuslalm (waldhaeuslalm.at), named Styrian Alpine Hut 2024 in Gault&Milliau's Hutguide - catch a fish in the pond, then take it to be barbecued.

Nearest airport: Salzburg (1hr).

How to do it: Tui (0203 451 2688; tui.co.uk) offers a week at Hotel Planai from £675pp including B&B accommo-

modation and flights. Nature and Wellness Hotel Höflehner (00 43 3686 2548; hoeflehner.com) has an extensive spa; four nights full-board from £585pp.

schladming-dachstein.at

Q&A

What will the weather be like?

Varied - these are mountains after all. It can be really hot, cool (to very cold) higher up, with the possibility of summer thunderstorms.

What should I pack?

Layers. Sturdy footwear. Rain gear. Reusable water bottle.

When should I visit?

Summer season is generally June-September. Lifts in higher areas may only run to late August, others stay open into October. Some mountain passes are only accessible July-August.

Getting around: should I drive?

Ideally not. Alpine resorts usually have combinations of trains, buses, chairlifts, gondolas, ebikes and scooters - often covered by good-value or free visitor passes.

Can go skiing in summer?

Yes! You'll need to go high, to glaciers. For instance, Hintertux (Austria) or the Matterhorn Glacier Paradise (Switzerland).

BEST FOR

ART

Santa Maria Maggiore, Italy

The lush Valle Vigezzo, in Piedmont's Lepontine Alps, is also known as the Painters' Valley, on account of how many artists have worked and studied here over the centuries. The mountain village of Santa Maria Maggiore (at 840m) is home to the Rossetti Valentini Fine Arts School (fondazionerossettivalentini.it), founded in 1878 and still hosting courses alongside its impressive gallery.

The village itself, set amid woods and meadows, is also pretty as a picture, and has more museums: visit the Fragrance House, which celebrates local links to eau de cologne, and the Chimney Sweep Museum, which tells the story of Vigezzo's hardworking emigrants. Then explore the great outdoors - follow trails that lead into landscapes painted by local artists or hike the historic Via del Mercato, a 60km mule-track through the Vigezzo Valley, used by traders for centuries.

Insider tip: Travel through the valley via the Vigezzina Centovalli trainline (vigezzinacentovalli.com), which connects Domodossola and Locarno in breathtaking fashion. It's possible to buy one- or two-day hop-on, hop-off tickets (from €6).

Nearest airport: Milan Malpensa (1hr 20m).

How to do it: Small, family-run Hotel Miramonti (00 39 0324 95013; almiramonti.com) has B&B doubles from £112pn.

lagomaggioreexperience.it;
visitpiemonte.com



▲ In the frame: the Rossetti Valentini Fine Art School in Santa Maria Maggiore



STEFAN FUERTBAUER, ALAMY; ROGER GRUETTER/BET; KLEMENS KOENIG, RICHARD SCHABETSBERGER

> Kitzbühel – 'your classic Alpine resort'

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