



How to have the perfect Christmas ski holiday

I should confess that, in my entirely biased opinion, there's no better place to spend Christmas than in a ski resort. Crisp, sunny days are spent skiing on surprisingly quiet mountains, while evenings bring fairy light-bestrewn markets scented with mulled wine, roast chestnuts and spiced biscuits, exceeding the most nostalgic expectations of an all-too-often overly commercialised time of year.



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If money were no object, I'd book a catered chalet for my extended family every Christmas, relegating overpriced, overcooked turkeys and rainy Boxing Day slogs to the past. And let's face it, when the cost of Christmas lunch for two at my local gastro pub in Kent costs the same as a six-day Méribel Family Flex Lift Pass (€273 for up to two adults and one child), I know where I'd rather be.

But is it possible to enjoy Christmas on the slopes when funds are limited? Should you hold out for a late deal to see if the snow arrives? Do people actually ski on Christmas Day? Here's how to achieve the ultimate skiing Christmas holiday.

The key to securing the best value Christmas ski holiday (or indeed securing one at all) is to book early. According to a report from ski specialist Alpine Answers, the post-pandemic trend for advance holiday booking is particularly strong for the festive period, with 69 per cent of Alpine chalet beds already sold for this Christmas by Sept 23 2024.

Early booking is particularly important for hotels, whose pricing is more fluid than individual chalets. Here's an example: VIP Ski was offering a seven-night stay for a family of four in a family room at Bear Lodge in Les Arcs from £4,332 in August, including chalet catering and airport transfers. Just two months later (mid-October), the hotel's family rooms were sold out, meaning the least expensive option for a family of four was two adjoining rooms at £8,596.



A word of warning from Simon Hoskyns of Alpine Answers for anyone still hoping for last-minute deals: “You may well be in for a shock this season. The lack of ski holiday companies offering flight-inclusive packages is one reason why deals will be particularly thin on the ground this winter.”

While skiing over Christmas comes at a premium, it invariably costs less than skiing over New Year, February half term or Easter. Take Chalet Genepi in Méribel: the seven-bedroom chalet currently costs €39,930 for Christmas (Dec 22 to 29 2024), including lavish chalet catering with fine wines and an in-resort chauffeur service with Bramble Ski. The same property costs €69,970 over New Year (Dec 29 2024 to Jan 5 2025).

If you're not wholeheartedly set on celebrating Christmas on Dec 25, you can save big by toasting the Yuletide prematurely. Not only will accommodation be significantly cheaper (Chalet Genepi, as above, costs €20,400 from Dec 15 to 21 2024) but lift passes usually cost less in the first three weeks of December too.

Perhaps the most burning question on your lips is: “Will there be snow?” The answer is simple: “Yes, if you choose your resort wisely.” Christmas falls relatively early in the ski season, but higher altitude resorts (think Obergurgl, Val Thorens, Zermatt and Cervinia), and those with advanced artificial snowmaking systems (Saalbach-Hinterglemm, Val d'Isère and Verbier) are sure to have adequate cover over the festive period. If you're still concerned, operators including Inghams and Crystal Ski offer snow guarantees, promising to transport you to an alternative resort nearby should fewer than 10 per cent of the runs in your booked resort be open due to insufficient snow cover.

Christmas Day falls on a Wednesday this year, which is ideal for guests booking holidays with weekend transfer days – travel plans won't interrupt the celebrations – but airports and roads still get busy over the festive period. One way around this is to book flights to smaller airports, such as Innsbruck for Austrian resorts; Chambéry and Grenoble for the French Alps; Bolzano for the Dolomites; and Zürich rather than Geneva for Swiss resorts (although officially the busier airport, Zürich typically offers a smoother travel experience than Geneva).

James Palmer-Tomkinson, founder of the Klosters specialist PT Ski, says: “I suggest getting late-morning or early-afternoon flights to Zürich, when road traffic will be lightest. The time you really want to avoid being on the roads is Sunday afternoon.”

Private transfer companies often up their prices over the festive season, with the cost of a one-way Zürich-Klosters transfer for up to five people currently weighing in at €730 on Dec 22 2024 with Grandlane Transfer. Look out for operators like PT Ski, which offers complimentary return transfers (complete with hampers stocked with refreshments), as well as free ski hosting on the mountains.

While some would venture that not having to cook or clean over Christmas (or even put up decorations) is priceless, a fully catered chalet is your priciest option. Fortunately, self-catered chalets and apartments have evolved over recent years, with many now offering optional daily breakfast deliveries, daily or weekly cleaning services, and the delivery of pre-prepared evening meals. Bringing down your accommodation costs might free you up to indulge in some slap-up lunches – mountain restaurants are particularly atmospheric over the festive period.

Do people ski on Christmas Day? Absolutely! Often in Santa outfits to add to the general merriment. Christmas Eve is particularly peaceful on the slopes as it's when European nations celebrate in



earnest. Hit the slopes on Christmas Day morning and you'll have them to yourself as the Europeans recover from the excesses of the previous day, and the British commence their celebrations.

If you're considering booking week-long ski school classes, it's worth noting that lessons continue on Christmas Day, so you'll have to weigh up the value of missing a day or two if you plan to spend them with family.

If Christmas on the slopes sounds tempting, here are five holidays still with availability this year.

Ski France is offering "kids stay free" deals at select hotels in Méribel, Les Deux Alpes and Courchevel. Stay at Méribel's ski-in/ski-out 0 for the option to select B&B, half board or all-inclusive accommodation.

Ski France (0203 475 4756; skifrance.co.uk) offers seven nights' B&B at Hôtel Le Mottaret from £2,092 for a family of three sharing a prestige room, departing Dec 21.

Set at 1,688m on the slopes of the **Portes du Soleil** ski area, with slopes reaching a snowsure 2,277m, the 17-room Hotel l'Etable in Les Crosets is the definition of Christmas charm and romance. Travel on Fridays to avoid busy weekend changeover days.

Alpine Answers (020 7801 1080; alpineanswers.co.uk) offers seven nights' B&B at the Hotel l'Etable from £1,895pp, including return London to Geneva flights and private taxi transfers, departing Dec 20.

La Thuile (known to Italians as "little Siberia" for its tendency to be hit by snowstorms) shares a ski area with La Rosière in France, making it an ideal destination for a short and sweet hit of snowsure skiing and cross-border culture.

Iglu Ski (020 3811 6276; iglusk.com) offers four nights at Hotel Planibel from £470pp, room only, departing Dec 23.

Pack up family and friends and allow the staff of the 10-bedroom Chalet Montfort to tend to your every festive need with lavish meals, free-flowing drinks, sleigh rides and gingerbread making.

Leo Trippi (01285 366 030; leotrippi.com) offers seven nights at Chalet Montfort from €48,000 for 20 people sharing, including chalet catering and in-resort driver service, departing Dec 22.

Treat the kids to Christmas in Lapland, complete with reindeer safaris, northern lights, husky sledging and Arctic snowmobiling – plus skiing in Finland's largest resort. Stay in the family-friendly resort of Ylläs, saving £250pp, and add a private meeting with Santa and his elves for festive cheer.

Inghams (01483 319 592; inghams.co.uk) offers seven nights' B&B at the Äkäs Alp Apartments from £1,119pp for a family of four, including return flights from Manchester and transfers, departing Dec 22.