



## The Case for the Ski Chalet

All-inclusive skiing with a private twist.

There's an alternative to the Great American Ski Vacation. Making a winter sojourn begs repeating, for good sport and good company alike. But if you've gone the way of the North American ski-in/ski-out luxury resort, you know how the hidden extras add up fast, as one complaint of US ski travelers is the constant nickel-and-diming. An appeal of all-inclusive trips is knowing the cost going in, but while there are ultra-luxe, all-inclusive options in other kinds of travel, that model doesn't exist in skiing—except at staffed chalets.

It was the British who invented the ski vacation, crossing the channel to hit the slopes in the Alps. Their preference endures for sharing lavish homes with family and friends, employing chefs, massage therapists, and ski instructors through the week. More opulent models include full-size indoor pools, gyms that rival those at much larger hotels, home theaters, pool tables, hot tubs, saunas, wine cellars, heated boot rooms, and even golf simulators. But best of all, from hot tubs to the yoga studio, you have it all to yourself.

"You have more rooms than your family would in a hotel, it's more personalized, and the staff works just for you," said Rick Reichsteil, president of **Alpine Adventures** ([alpineadventures.net](http://alpineadventures.net)), America's leading luxury ski travel specialist, which often arranges European chalet trips. "It starts right away: They pick you up at the airport, take you around town, you never have to deal with driving. But the best thing is that everyone who goes skiing is on the same schedule, and no matter how nice a hotel is, they can't give everyone spa appointments at 3 or 4 p.m., but that's when everyone wants them. Here you go back to your house and take turns getting massages

while sitting in your hot tub drinking Champagne."

After skiing, it's typical to be greeted at the door with flutes of bubbly and private-chef cuisine that rivals top restaurants. **Purple Ski** ([purpleski.com](http://purpleski.com)) is a high-end, UK-based chalet operator that has also embraced the US market, offering white-glove concierge services and multiple luxury chalets in three of France's top ski resorts: Méribel, Courchevel, and Val d'Isère. These sleep 10–16, usually with accommodations for nannies or personal assistants, and start from \$36,000–\$60,000/week. With nightly dinner menus spanning 7–10 courses, from canapés through multiple fine dining courses to cheese boards and dessert. While basic weekly rentals include drivers, house staff, breakfast, après-ski snacks, and dinners all but one night, with free-flowing Champagne and fine French wines, their concierges routinely add in every bell and whistle you choose in advance: from massage therapists to daily ski instruction, lift tickets, transfers, lunch reservations on the slopes, in-chalet rental gear delivery and fitting, all in one simple transaction—and at a discount to what you would pay separately. Because the market is aimed at the United Kingdom, everyone speaks English.

The staffed chalet model is most common in France, especially at Les 3 Vallées (Courchevel, Méribel, Val Thorens), Les Portes du Soleil (Les Gets-Morzine, etc.) and Tignes (Val d'Isère, etc.). In Switzerland there's Zermatt and Les 4 Vallées (Verbier, etc.), in Italy Cortina and Via Lattea (Sestriere, etc.), and in Austria St. Anton am Arlberg. As an added bonus these large, chalet-centric resorts are all much bigger, with more skiing and more towns than even the largest resorts in North America. •

—Larry Olmsted



Courtesy Purple Ski/White Lines (3). Opposite: Creative Images Database/Photo.com/Left: Everett (3), Purple Ski/White Lines