

Europe's best snow-sure ski resorts

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Europe's ski season is officially in full swing – but the question on everyone's lips is will there be snow? The Pyrenees and Alps in France, Italy, Switzerland and Austria have already had good headstarts to the season, but with the increasing threat of climate change seeing snow arrive later and melt earlier than usual, along with the unreliability of storms touching the peaks, it is truly anyone's guess as to how long certain ski areas will have to wait for that coveted 'dump'. However, there are a handful of snow-laden locales that can practically guarantee good conditions, largely thanks to their high altitude and prime positions for catching the weather. Not sure where to book this year? Here are the most snow-sure ski resorts in Europe.

Val Thorens, France



Image: Shutterstock

Elevation: Resort altitude – 2,300m; peak altitude – 3,230m

Average snowfall: 600-640cm per year

The biggest and highest ski resort in Europe, Val Thorens is no doubt one of the most snow-sure ski areas in the world, promising plenty of snow-padded pistes from November through to May. The resort's high elevation, with most of its terrain above 2,000m, lends itself to

consistently cold temperatures that aid snow retention, while its natural cirque shape means it frequently benefits from snow dumps when the storms roll in.

Val Thorens forms part of the Three Valleys and features 78 runs across 150km of pistes that are great for all abilities. Not only are the snow and slopes an attraction, but Val Thorens hasn't skimped on its state-of-the-art resort amenities either: the resort boasts 2,000 snow cannons to guarantee coverage on key pistes, while the town itself offers a wide variety of hotels and restaurants, alongside a vibrant après scene.

Where to stay: Le Fitz Roy





Designed as a home-away-from-home for skiers and mountain enthusiasts, Le Fitz Roy is the epitome of understated alpine luxury. Cosset away in one of the 72 design-led rooms – some with uninterrupted views of the snow-capped peaks, village below or the slopes. Dine at the signature Beca restaurant, which serves chef Samuel Neveu's reimagination of European dishes: think house-smoked salmon pate with blinis to start followed by a variety of grass-fed steak cuts, seafood risotto, Fines de Claire oysters, and lobster linguine. While the hotel offers ski-in, ski-out access, ensure you rest your legs at the newly-renovated Spa Du Fitz Roy where you can indulge in tailor-made treatments and relax at the pool, sauna and steam bath.

From £600 per night.

Zermatt, Switzerland



Elevation: Resort altitude – 1,600m; peak altitude – 3,899m

Average snowfall: 388cm per year

Situated in the shadow of the world famous Matterhorn, Zermatt is Switzerland's highest ski resort and therefore benefits from plenty of snow dumps throughout the season. Its highest ski lift reaches a whopping 3,899m to open out onto the Matterhorn Ski Paradise: home to endless powdery pistes set against a backdrop of majestic mountains. Its north-facing position also keeps them in the shade helping to maintain powdery snow, while the majority of Zermatt's runs are above the snowline, so you are guaranteed good conditions throughout the resort. After a day on the slopes, return to the car-free town to experience the essence of Swiss alpine charm.

Where to stay: Mont Cervin Palace





Zermatt is a Grand Dame on the ski scene – and Mont Cervin Palace is Zermatt's Grand Dame. Dating back to the 1850s, this is one of Switzerland's most legendary hotels, with David Bowie, Steven Spielberg and Carrie Fisher all on its guestbook. Inside, four interconnected buildings house 150 guest rooms and provide stunning views of the Mischabel, Edelweiss, or Matterhorn. The huge Spa Nescens is a serene escape with indoor-outdoor pools, saunas, steam baths, and anti-ageing Nescens treatments, while foodies won't be disappointed with restaurants ranging from Michelin-starred Ristorante Capri to Joseph's Bar for cocktails, afternoon tea and snacks accompanied by live music.

From £770 per night.

Val d'Isère, France



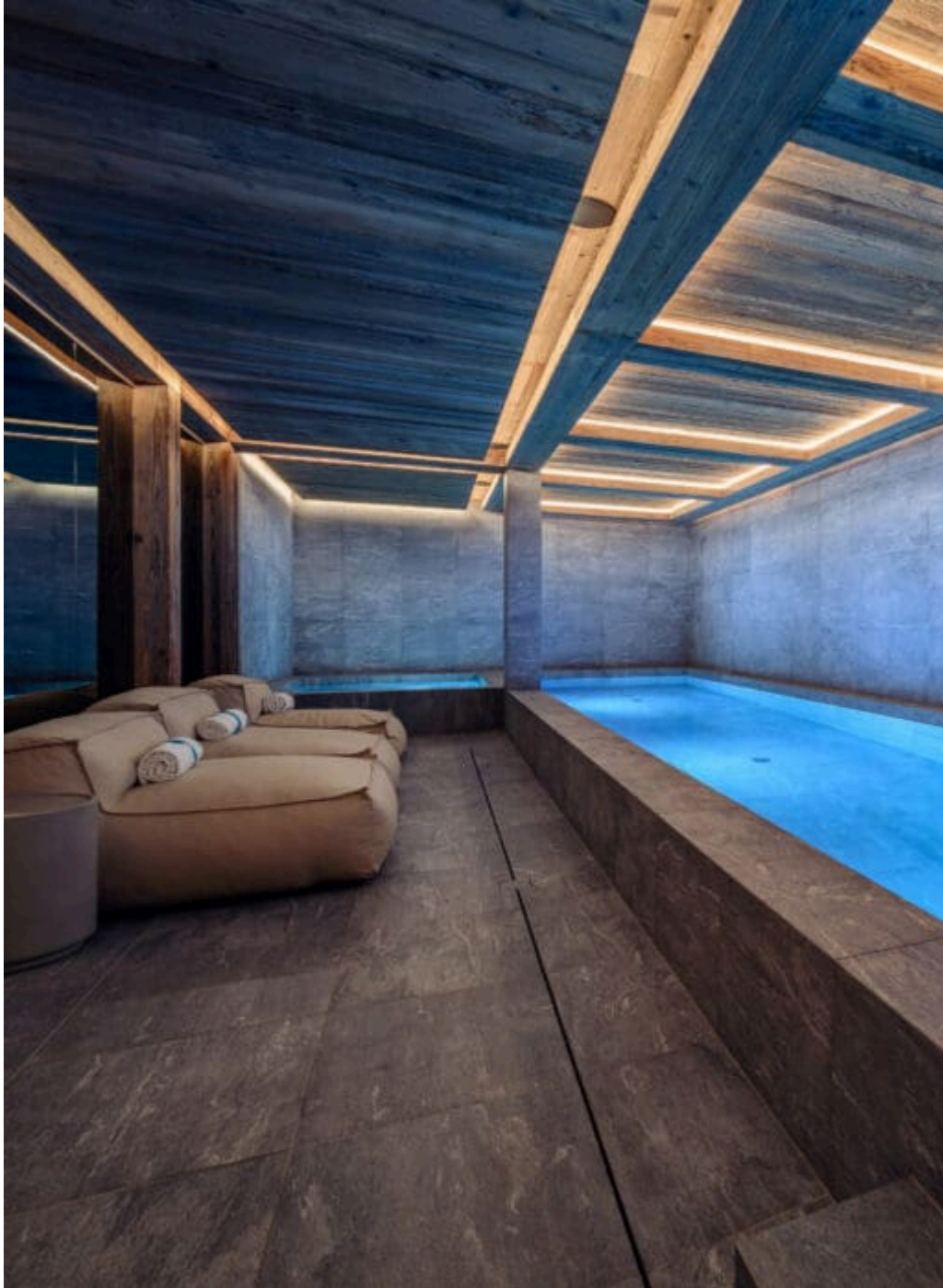
Image: Shutterstock

Elevation: Resort altitude - 1,850m; peak altitude - 3,456m

Average snowfall: 550cm per year

Val d'Isère benefits from one of the most revered natural phenomena in the snow world. Named Retour d'Est (Return from the East), this specific, powerful weather pattern sees cold but moist air from the Mediterranean become trapped by a low-pressure system known as the Genoa Low. This then flows back over the Alps from Italy, delivering massive, heavy snowfall a handful of times each season, especially in high altitude areas such as Val d'Isère. Don't miss the 300km of pistes, glacier skiing on the Pisailas, and access to the legendary Espace Killy in nearby Tignes.

Where to stay: Chalet Cervinia





Luxury chalet operator Purple Ski's latest addition, Chalet Cervinia, has just opened for its debut season. Sleeping up to 13 in six bedrooms, it's the brainchild of owners Etienne and Jeanne Roesch Degoy and derives its name from the Italian name for the Matterhorn. Tucked away in Val d'Isère's Le Joseray, the three-storey residence is less than 100m from the Joseray piste and a short walk from the village centre. There's more than ample space to entertain, whether that's in the cosy lounge by the roaring fire or at the all-singing, all-dancing spa, with its hot tub, sauna, massage room and expansive swimming pool. Unsurprisingly, Chalet Cervinia doesn't skimp on the small touches: expect a home cinema experience, complete with tiered seating and a starry-night sky lighting design, and a custom boot room with heaters to make getting out on the slopes a breeze.

From £31,026 per week.

Cervinia, Italy



Image: Shutterstock

Elevation: Resort altitude - 2,050m; peak altitude - 3,883m

Average snowfall: 525cm per year

While Zermatt sits in the Swiss shadow of the Matterhorn, Cervinia is Italy's counterpart on the other side of the majestic mountain, nestled in the Aosta Valley ski area. The majority of runs here are west-facing so benefit from sunny ski conditions and great visibility, creating perfect conditions for novices. For the more advanced, however, access to glacier skiing means snow is virtually guaranteed for a very long season that runs until late spring, aided by the fact that 95 per cent of Cervinia's ski area is above 2,100m (so rarely turns to slush). Take the cable car up 3,883m to the peak of the Matterhorn Glacier Paradise, which interconnects with sister resort Valtournenche and is home to the longest prepared downhill run in Europe. Back at an altitude of 2,050 metres, the town of Cervinia is traffic-free and filled with traditional trattorias and bustling bars.

Where to stay: VRetreats Cervino





Eco-friendly luxury resort VRetreats Cervino is a popular bolthole for Italians looking to ski Cervinia, housing 70 stylish rooms with private balconies from which to take in spectacular views of the Matterhorn. Ensuring skiing is a breeze, the five-star hotel houses a winter boutique where you can buy ski passes without additional charges, complimentary shuttles to and from the slopes, and a chic boot room with warming lockers to ensure your kit is crisp and dry. Dine on Italian specialities served with a side of Matterhorn views at Ristorante Panorama, or traditional Valdostan dishes at Ristorante Abri. Plus, don't forget to make the most of the Adara Spa featuring a warm indoor pool and steam room.

From £280 per night.

Saas-Fee, Switzerland





Images: Shutterstock

Elevation: Resort altitude - 1,800m; peak altitude - 3,600m

Average snowfall: 513cm per year

Surrounded by 13 snow-capped peaks ascending to a whopping 4,000m, Saas-Fee is enveloped in a cold, snow-trapping microclimate which may not sound idyllic to some, but certainly is for skiers. One of Europe's most reliable destinations, Saas-Fee continues to welcome guests until late spring every year. Fringing the large Fee Glacier and boasting north-facing slopes which grip onto snow, it's home to more than 100km of pistes that are ideal for skiing and snowboarding, while the village is home to a large nursery area where novices can master their snow plough in spacious surroundings.

Where to stay: The Capra





Having retained its two Michelin Keys this year, The Capra is a five-star alpine lodge home to 38 suites and rooms, blending chalet-style elegance with modern comfort. While the hotel offers a regular shuttle bus to the Saas-Fee slopes – or alternatively, you can walk to the lifts in 10 minutes – it would be remiss not to make the most of the hotel's luxury amenities. We recommend dining on locally-sourced produce at Brasserie 1809 (be adventurous and try the Swiss wagyu tongue with horseradish and sauerkraut) and spending an afternoon indulging in personalised treatments at the Peak Health Spa, from facials to care for your skin after long days in the sun (Saas-Fee has 300 sunshine days per year), to therapeutic massages for tired muscles after back-to-back days on the slopes. Anddd, relax.

From £395 per night.