



Your best **ski holiday** **EVER!**

Don't know where to start with organising a ski holiday this year? We have all the info you need, from quirky trips to the latest kit, whatever level you are

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There's nothing quite like being in the mountains: crystal clear air, sparkling sunshine, pristine snow and exercise – as well as cheese fondue, vin chaud (or glühwein) and cosy, wooden chalets, of course. However, these days, skiing need no longer mean the same old formulaic holiday – you can combine skiing with yoga, learn how to tackle off-piste in an all-female group or jump out of helicopter at a remarkably affordable price. Here's our round-up of this season's top trips and kit to suit every taste.

BEGINNERS

The lure of the mountains is greater than ever, so now is the time to try skiing. Equipment is lighter and easier to use, resorts have faster lifts, more guaranteed seasons (thanks to artificial snowmaking), better restaurants and more fun at après. And ski holidays aren't just about skiing – whether you want to do downward dog or go husky sledding, there's so much more to do in the mountains.

COMBINE SKIING AND YOGA

The French resort of La Rosière is perfect for families and beginners, and in a new offering this year, Chalet Rosière is running Full Moon yoga retreats for all levels of skier and yogi. Included is two daily yoga sessions, several hours on the slopes, lift passes, breakfast and a four-course dinner from a vegan menu, plus a daily massage – heaven! Full Moon Yoga Retreat at Chalet Rosière costs from €1,290 for four nights; chaletrosiere.com.



Norway is great for beginners



TOP TIP

Fed up with speaking bad French? Combine skiing with French lessons in Morzine. The Alpine French School offers trips where you ski in the morning and learn French in the afternoon. Prices start from €950 including lift pass and accommodation; alpineskischool.com.

PARTY ON

This year the Arlberg becomes Austria's largest ski area, and where better to stay and find out what skiing – and of course après ski – is all about than in the famous resort of St Anton? This place rocks both on and off the slopes – and now that the exchange rate is fluctuating, Austria is an excellent bet for a good-value ski holiday. So why not get a group together and stay in the Chalet Schlosshof (it sleeps up to 22)? A week in St Anton with Crystal Ski Holidays costs from £585; crystalski.co.uk. The price includes accommodation, flights and meals. Lessons cost from £161 per week.

GO SCANDI

Skiing in Scandinavia is on the up, especially for families and beginners. Pronounced 'bait-oh-stir-len', Beitostølen in Norway is ideal for those new to skiing, with gentle beginner slopes, an English-speaking ski school and wide pistes for cruising. Plus if you fancy a break from skiing, there are many other activities to do, from dog sledding and swimming to rafting down the slopes in inflatable boats and cross-country skiing. A learn-to-ski week with Ski Safari in Beitostølen costs from £919 (for two sharing) in a self-catered apartment, including return flights (London to Oslo), transfers, lift passes, ski rental and ski school for five days; visit skisafari.com for more information.

KIT FOR BEGINNERS



Skiwear: While you don't want to spend a fortune on kit when you're new to skiing, don't skimp – waterproof, warm, specialist clothing is a must. This outfit is ideal. Roxy Snowstorm Jet Ski Jacket, £185, and Roxy Nadia Pants, £125 (ellis-brigham.com).



Baselayers: Falke has a great new range of baselayers. The gorgeous merino Wool-Tech Zip Shirt (£85; falke.com) is ideal for moisture management, keeping the chill at bay on cold days while you wait your turn in your lesson.



On-the-slopes headwear: Not only is a helmet an excellent piece of protective equipment; it will also keep your head warm. Try the eco-friendly Picture Organic Clothing Hubber 3.0 Helmet (£82.99; snowleader.co.uk).



Off-the-slopes headwear: Cosy and fun, beanies are brilliant at keeping your noodle toasty when you take off your helmet. And they help to hide the dreaded 'helmet hair'! Barts Sandy Beanie (£25; ellis-brigham.com).

INTERMEDIATES

Once you've mastered your carving turns, the mountain opens up and offers all types of adventure. Don't just stick on the 'intermediate plateau' cruising within your comfort zone; use your slope time to improve your skills or learn how to take your first turns off-piste. Or why not get a group of your friends together and enjoy the party atmosphere at one of the many great comedy, food and music festivals held across the Alps every year?

STRETCH & SKI

Hone your skills on a women's ski camp. Element Concept runs weekend and week-long women's camps in Verbier, Switzerland for intermediate, advanced and expert skiers. The courses include small-group coaching, video analysis and two sessions with life coach Elaine France, founder of Women Who Move Mountains. Element is also running a week-long retreat on February 6-10, 2017 including yoga, massage, psychology sessions, stretching and nutritional advice. Prices start at CHF300 for a weekend, not including accommodation; elementconcept.com.

GET INTO THE GROOVE

Dubbed 'Glastonbury on snow', Snowbombing (Mayrhofen, Austria; April 3-8, 2017) is an iconic music festival that showcases top DJs and world-class bands. This year, it celebrates its 18th birthday and, on top of sunny spring skiing,

expect mountainside stages, igloo raves, pool parties, enchanted forest parties and Austria's largest fancy-dress street bash — plus much more. Prices cost from around £738, including festival wristband, four-day lift pass, coach travel and equipment hire but not including accommodation; snowbombing.com.

PRACTISE YOUR OFF-PISTE SKILLS

Fancy going off piste? Learn the skills you need in the Dolomites in mixed groups or women-only weeks with Wow Ski Tours — new this year. The price includes three or four days' touring, two days' skiing on the piste and a day off in a health spa. The jovial and welcoming owners of Casa Zilli Chalet are qualified instructors and will ski with you on the piste days; on touring days you'll learn to ski off piste with a qualified IMFGA guide. The price includes all guiding, accommodation, breakfast and even evening meals in a local restaurant. From £1,399; wowskitours.com.

TOP TIP

Don't overestimate your ability. Skiing, and the mountains, are dangerous. When booking a trip, make sure you're honest about your experience — if you end up in an off-piste group when you haven't skied off-piste before, you could be out of your depth and in difficulty. Plus, you'll hold back the others in the group who don't want to wait around for someone who can't keep up.



KIT FOR INTERMEDIATES



Skiwear: Whether you're skiing in Verbier or partying, you need to look slick on and off the slopes. Peak Performance is the iconic Swedish brand, so grab the Lanzo Jacket, £320, and Pants, £250 (snowandrock.com).



Base and midlayers: French brand Mons Royale makes merino wool base and midlayers you could wear day or night. We like the Switch Pullover Hoodie, £139.99; and Alagna ¾ Legging, £59.99 (futureproof.life).



Socks: Find your ideal pair from Falke's ski range. The SK2 (£20; falke.com) suits intermediates, as it focuses on warmth and comfort, rather than just performance.



Backpack: You'll want to take an extra layer, a muesli bar and water for a day on the piste. Osprey's Kresta backpacks (from £100; ospreyeurope.com) are their first ski packs with a women-specific fit.

Be avalanche ready: don't even think about going off-piste without a shovel, probe and transceiver — nor a guide.

EXPERTS

More and more skiers are pushing the boundaries in the backcountry (remote off-piste) than ever before in search of adrenaline-filled experiences. The following guided trips will be nothing short of life-changing, and don't worry if you don't have friends who match up to your ability; these are all the kind of trip you can make solo and team up with like-minded people when you get there. Get saving those pennies!

GO ON TOUR

Mountain Tracks has world-renowned expertise in mountaineering and adventure trips and its new, uncrowded, hut-to-hut ski tour from Engelberg in Switzerland is one of the best in the Alps. It has a focus on top-notch descents rather than the long traverses prevalent on some other 'haute routes' – so you'll be doing some good downhill as well as the climbs and flat bits. Urner Haute Route, March 11-18, 2017,

£1,495; visit mountaintracks.co.uk for more information.

BE A HIGH FLYER

No need to fly to Canada or Alaska to pip your heli-ski cherry any more – you can pop to Italy for a mini break! Try a four-day heli introduction, all season, from £1,485 with heliski.co.uk. This relatively affordable short break combines off-piste guided skiing and one day of heli-skiing. It's perfect for accomplished skiers and snowboarders keen to give heli-skiing a go, and the trip includes four nights' B&B accommodation in a three-star hotel in Alagna, Italy, airport transfers, four-day lift pass, four days with a UIAGM guide and one day's heli-skiing with two flights.

EXPLORE KYRGYZSTAN

Ski companies continue to push the boundaries with exciting destinations such as Iran, Turkey and Lebanon — and this season Snoworks has a new ski adventure to Kyrgyzstan. If you're competent off-piste

and on black runs, join a 10-day trip in the Tian Shan Mountains, staying in yurts and skiing slopes accessed by snowmobiles. The cost includes a local guide and meals but not international flights. Ski Kyrgyzstan runs from February 11, 2017 and costs £2,325; visit snoworks.co.uk.

TOP TIP

While you can cycle, run and gym it to your heart's content, nothing will prepare you for skiing like slope time. The UK now has a great array of dry and indoor slopes for you to practise on, helping you get ski-fit.

The Snow Centre at Hemel Hempstead offers ladies' mornings on Mondays and Wednesdays, with two hours of group lessons, then a drink in its restaurant after.

KIT FOR EXPERTS



Goggles: Different lenses for different lights and conditions are a thing of the past thanks to Dragon Alliance X1s goggles with Rose Transitions lenses (£225; snowboard-asylum.com).



Backpack: The Black Diamond Halo 28L JetForce Airbag Rucksack (£849; ellis-brigham.com) offers a chance of survival in an avalanche as it inflates for three minutes, then deflates to create an air pocket.



Transceiver: The Mammut Pulse Barryvox Transceiver (£299.99; ellis-brigham.com) is one of the easiest and best avalanche transceivers on the market with great range and marking functions for people you've found.



Skiwear: Opt for a shell jacket and pants you can use as part of a layering system with down jackets underneath and lots of zips to let in air when you're climbing uphill. We love the Arc'teryx Procline pant, £240, and Comp jacket, £240 (arcteryx.com). ■

