

The  
world's  
**best**  
**ski resorts**  
— and how to pick  
the one  
right  
that's  
for  
you





The worst thing about a ski holiday? Choosing where to go. Because between the brochures and the blogs, the self-appointed experts and the so-called influencers, you'll end up with a hundred conflicting versions of where you 'simply must go this season, darling...'

Which is why, over the next 11 pages, **Sean Newsom** does the simplest — yet hardest — thing: takes the 15 resorts Brits visit the most, and tells you which is right for you. Read on and ski...



## Mayrhofen, Austria

### Why is it one of the best?

Book one resort and you get access to a whole valley — and a mouthwatering range of skiing terrain.

### What's the skiing like?

Wedged between sheer valley walls, with most of its skiing a gondola ride away, Mayrhofen doesn't immediately strike you as one of the greats. But up there, out of sight, lie two very different playgrounds. One mountain, Penken, offers an energetic mix of steepish pistes, which culminate in one of the scariest groomed runs in the Alps,

Harakiri. The other, the Ahorn, serves up a gentle plateau more or less set aside for wobbly intermediates, with a slopeside igloo bar on hand to soothe frayed nerves. Even better, your lift pass unlocks three more sizeable lift systems nearby. Day-trip between them and you've got the richest mix of ski terrain in the Alps.

### How reliable is the snow?

The Hintertux Glacier is a 40-minute bus ride south of Mayrhofen, one of only two Alpine ski areas open all year. So — provided you're prepared to commute — your ski-holiday will be thaw-proof. That said, to avoid slushy slopes in some of the lower areas, go between January and early March.

### What's the vibe?

If Julie Andrews had red hair and hipster tattoos, this would be her valley. Think *Sound of Music* scenery, buzzing bars and urban-flavoured architecture — most notably at the Kunstraumbistro, a daring, glass-walled box that juts out from the side of the Ahorn ([mayrhofner-bergbahnen.com](http://mayrhofner-bergbahnen.com)).

### And the accommodation?

The Alpenresort Thanner is typical of the area's best accommodation: old-school on the outside, minimalist and modern within, and not overpriced. Its self-catering apartments start at £350pp a week, based on four sharing ([alpenresort-thanner.at](http://alpenresort-thanner.at)). Fly to





## Verbier, Switzerland

### Why is it one of the best?

Prince Harry loved Verbier's off-piste terrain. If you ski powder, or want to learn how, you will, too.

### What's the skiing like?

The key to Verbier's world-class status is almost entirely due to three lifts — the ones that deliver off-pisters to the peaks of Attelas, Mont Gelé and Mont Fort, for multiple deep-powder descents. But don't fear: Verbier's ski schools attract an elite band of instructors who'll help you make the transition from piste to powder.

### How reliable is the snow?

Fresh snow can fall any time in the season, but be first at the lift — it is soon skied into suds by off-pisters.

### What's the vibe?

Posh, party-loving and adventurous, Harry was the perfect Verbier mascot when he holidayed here as a bachelor.

### And the accommodation?

You want to be close to the Medran lift station, but off the busy road that serves it. The four-star Hotel Vanessa ticks both boxes and has large bedrooms as well. With Inghams, one week starts at £1,619pp, half board, including flights (ingham.co.uk).

### How child-friendly is it?

The combination of the Crèche Les Moulins and the self-contained Moulins nursery slope means that young, first-time skiers are well-provided for (crechedesmoulins.ch; childcare from £74 a day). But Verbier's steep pistes are not for the nervous.

### What can you do besides skiing?

Yoga. The Wholeycow yoga studio is just a short hobble from Hotel Vanessa (wholeycow.ch).



## SKI LIKE A LOCAL

Serge Burnichon, manager of Le 1928 Restaurant in Courchevel

'For years, the Alps were filled with retro self-service restaurants, but there's a lot more quality and choice these days, particularly here in Courchevel. La Cave des Creux (cavedescreux-courchevel.com), just below my restaurant, is a place I like a lot. It's a similar set-up to mine: run by a hands-on owner, alongside a team of young, enthusiastic staff. The brasserie-style menus are authentic, high-quality, and great-value. Another one of my favourites is La Casserole (facebook.com/lacasserolecourchevel) in Courchevel 1650. I love its traditional, cosy atmosphere — the ceiling beams, stone floor and dark wood-pannelled walls hung with old copper pans are cleverly contrasted with crisp, white table settings. It's impossible not to be charmed.'



## Courchevel, France

### Why is it one of the best?

The five-star intermediate pistes are what Courchevel is all about. No other Alpine resort is quite so flattering.

### What's the skiing like?

At top and bottom, Courchevel's slopes are steep enough to test the strongest legs, while in the middle there's a softer scoop for novices and intermediates. Add in tuition from British ski school New Generation (skinewgen.com) and this is one of the best resorts in which to master the parallel turn.

### How reliable is the snow?

It's not for a late-season run, but, mid-winter, the snow is soft and grippy in the high, north-facing bowls.

### What's the vibe?

Glitzy. About 18 five-star hotels dot the slopes, while gazillionaires jostle for tables at Le Cap Horn, where Wagyu ribs costs £279. For a more reasonable Michelin-starred lunch, ski down to L'Azimut in the village of Courchevel Le Praz (restaurantazimut.com; £35).

### And the accommodation?

Not everywhere is aimed at billionaires. Le Ski chalet specialist has a week in Chalet Blanchot in Courchevel Moriond village from £898pp, chalet board, with flights (leski.com).

### How child-friendly is it?

Gentle pistes are perfect for first-time families, and childcare specialist Esprit has a chalet-hotel beside one of them — the Crystal 2000 (espritski.com).

### What can you do besides skiing?

Join the super-rich at Le Bar in the Hotel Cheval Blanc (chevalblanc.com). Otherwise, the Aquamotion water park and spa is the star attraction (from £18; aquamotion-courchevel.com).

with EasyJet or BA, hire a car  
a week with carrentals.co.  
You'll be ready for a week of  
shopping adventure.  
child-friendly is it?  
down on the valley floor,  
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Penken, this isn't the best  
get your little ones fired up  
ing.  
you do besides skiing?  
Mayrhofen is complete  
uesday-night disco in  
ounge — the Ahorn's  
£22pp, including cable  
and welcome drink.)





## St Anton, Austria

### Why is it one of the best?

Young hearts, run free: St Anton's white-knuckle skiing feeds a wild party atmosphere. The sense of adventure is contagious.

### What's the skiing like?

Make no mistake: this is primarily a resort for strong legs and stout hearts. It's not just that its best pistes are plunging blacks. Nor that its signature off-piste run, the north face of the Valluga, begins on an unstable stretch of snow, immediately above a cliff. It's the fact that even the supposedly easy home runs can break an intermediate's spirit once they've been carved into moguls. Less experienced skiers should go elsewhere.

### How reliable is the snow?

Warth, at the other end of the lift system, notches up an average of 11 metres of the white stuff each winter. Lech, next door, gets around 7 metres. You won't be short of a flake or two.

### What's the vibe?

Risk-taking can be cathartic — expect big smiles and carefree spirits.

### And the accommodation?

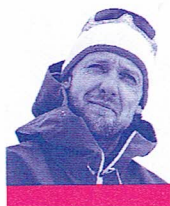
No need to hike to the lift — the unpretentious Chalet Hotel Rosanna is 450 metres from the Galzigbahn lift and starts at £1,029pp a week, chalet board, with flights (markwarner.co.uk).

### How child-friendly is it?

Next to the gentle stretch of Nasserein nursery slopes is the Chalet-Hotel Pepi Gabl — which has English-speaking childcare. For advanced skiers with first-time kids it's near-perfect.

### What can you do besides skiing?

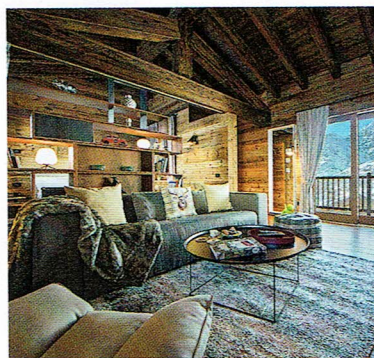
Chill at the slope-side Crazy Kanguruh bar, and start your evening with a



## SKILIKE A LOCAL

Patrick Bätz, mountain guide, St Anton

*'In St Anton, the après-ski is as important as the skiing itself. I've honed my route over the years, which starts at piste-side Sennhütte around 3pm, when the serious skiing is done and the jolly live music gets going. Then, because a lot of my regular clients' children are now teenagers, we ski on to the Crazy Kanguruh, or Taps, which cater to a younger crowd with more clubby, international music. And no après is complete without dropping into the legendary MooserWirt, just in time for The Final Countdown, which has been the first song every afternoon for as long as I can remember. We'll take a break for dinner in the village, before hitting the Postkeller and Bobo's, which are locals' favourites, and where you'll find all the instructors hanging out on a Wednesday night after the weekly formation skiing show. The best thing is that this is all included in the price of a day's guiding.'*



## Cervinia, Italy

### Why is it one of the best?

Oh-my-God scenery meets thaw-proof snow in this surprisingly gentle resort.

### What's the skiing like?

High, wide and spectacular are the watchwords. Cervinia's easy-going pistes unfurl across a vast mountain bowl, with the towering spike of the Matterhorn a constant companion. There's plenty of variety on offer on the Swiss side of its shared ski area, above Zermatt, but here, in Italy, beginner and intermediate skiers are kings. In fact, it's a good job the terrain is so forgiving — faced with such gobsmacking scenery, it can be hard to focus on your technique.

### How reliable is the snow?

This is as snowsure as Alpine skiing gets. The pistes aren't always soft, though: high winds sometimes expose a more challenging, hard-packed surface.

### What's the vibe?

The gentle gradients draw an unpretentious, inexperienced crowd, who aren't fussy about the functional architecture, or where they party (the Thistles pub is a favourite).

### And the accommodation?

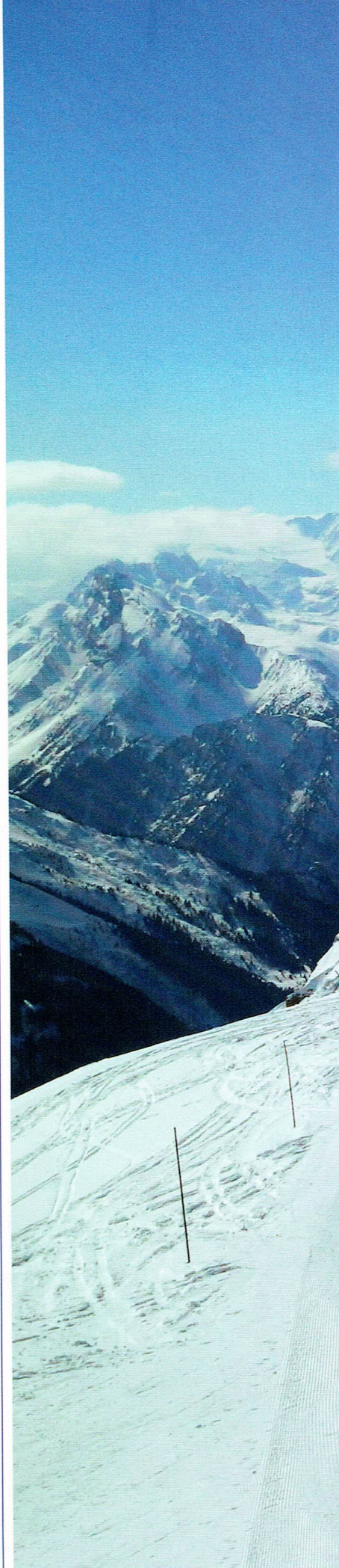
The chic Principe delle Nevi hotel is a sign of Cervinia's recent move upmarket; a week starts at £1,615pp, half board, with flights (skisolutions.com). Generally, accommodation is less high-falutin'. Inghams' Chalet Hotel Dragon starts at £759pp a week, chalet board, with flights (inghams.co.uk).

### How child-friendly is it?

In mid-winter, bad weather can be tough, as biting winds combine with white-out conditions. Bring kids at Easter.

### What can you do besides skiing?

Don't bring non-skiers — it's ski-only and bleak if you're not on the picture







## La Plagne, France

### Why is it one of the best?

Families love La Plagne's sweep of easy slopes. Little do they know, some of France's most challenging off-piste terrain is lurking nearby.

### What's the skiing like?

Pancake-flat in the middle, super-steep around the sides, La Plagne's slopes range from the bland to the bloody terrifying. Iron-nerved experts will want to test themselves on the north face of the 3,417m Bellecôte. Everyone else will be having a ball on the easy pistes of the central plateau, provided they don't come during the peak-season crush — in mid-February, it's hard to see the snow for the people.

### How reliable is the snow?

Most of the intermediate-friendly terrain is set between 1,500 and 2,500

metres. Good for Christmas to mid-March, but too low for Easter. Late season, aim for somewhere high such as Val Thorens or Cervinia instead.

### What's the vibe?

Away from the off-piste descents on the Bellecôte, La Plagne is like a giant park on snow: bustling, purposeful and brimming with kids. This isn't the place to be dancing on tables 'til 2am.

### And the accommodation?

Ten villages are scattered across the slopes, most dominated by multi-storey residences of self-catering flats. For a group of budget-conscious, mid-level skiers, Les Néréides at Plagne Bellecôte is a well-placed launchpad: one week starts at £226pp, self-catering, including a return Eurotunnel crossing for a car and passengers ([skicollection.co.uk](http://skicollection.co.uk)). Lower down, among the trees, Ski Beat has several

comfy chalets: from £599pp, chalet board, with flights ([skibeat.co.uk](http://skibeat.co.uk)).

### How child-friendly is it?

Kids quickly grow confident here, and for families who plan to spend all day on the slopes, a ski-in, ski-out self-catering apartment in one of the central villages, such as Plagne Soleil, is just the ticket. In Plagne Centre, on-site childcare is on offer at Mark Warner's Chalet Hotel Christina. Here, Christmas week starts at £1,049pp, chalet board, with flights ([markwarner.co.uk](http://markwarner.co.uk)).

### What can you do besides skiing?

Forget *Love Island*: turn La Plagne into Love Mountain with a night in Over the Moon, a converted piste-grooming machine with a luxury bedroom (£285 a night; [skipass-laplagne.com](http://skipass-laplagne.com)). Thrill-seekers should jump into an Olympic bobsleigh (£110; [skipass-laplagne.com](http://skipass-laplagne.com)). It's like being fired out of a gun



## Zermatt, Switzerland

### Why is it one of the best?

Like a secret kingdom of snow, led by the Alps' most eye-catching mountain, the Matterhorn. Few resorts match its magical atmosphere.

### What's the skiing like?

For everyone: you won't be skiing down the Matterhorn. Instead, most of Zermatt's pistes spread across three east shoulders of rock, well clear of the mountain's iconic spike. Meanwhile, at the top of the area, you can ski the Theodul Glacier at 3,883 metres, before popping over into Italy to try slopes in neighbouring Cervinia. How tough? It shouldn't. Much of the high, flattish terrain is easy for reasonably confident intermediates, and the Italian side of the ski area is even more 'flattering'. Just be sure to avoid the 'freeride pistes' (marked

orange on the piste map). These are never groomed, but they are made safe against avalanches by pre-emptive blasting. Depending on conditions, they offer either deep powder or moguls the size of Mini Coopers — best left to the experts.

### How reliable is the snow?

Very. It's so high you can even ski here in July and August.

### What's the vibe?

In a word: awestruck. Never mind the skiing, just being there is a privilege.

### And the accommodation?

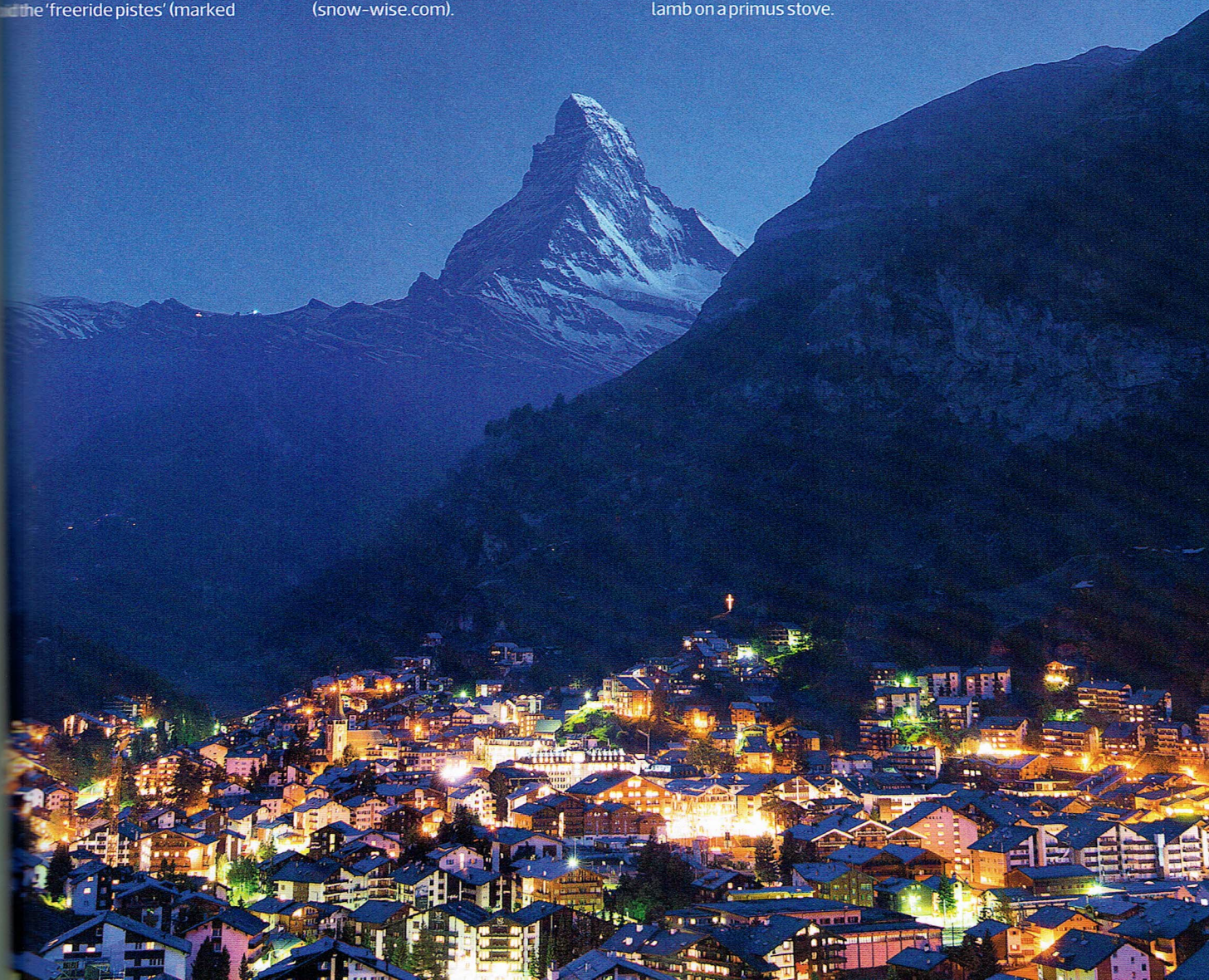
Save up hard and go the whole hog, checking into the five-star Omnia. A sleek, modernist palace set just above town, it eschews all the usual Alpine clichés in favour of clean lines, big windows and fuss-free decor. With Snow Wise, one week starts at £2,295pp, B&B, with flights (snow-wise.com).

### How child-friendly is it?

Car-free streets, sun-blackened barns, that mesmerising mountain: long before they've jumped on a ski lift, Zermatt's fairy-tale-like otherworldliness will have most children hooked. But wait 'til they already ski: the nursery slopes are scattered in penny packets above town and you need to ride at least one lift to reach them.

### What can you do besides skiing?

Sit down in a slope-side restaurant such as Blatten (blatten-zermatt.ch) and you'll quickly understand why lunch is such a big deal here. There's a rustic, elbows-on-the-table insouciance to the scene that completely belies the mouthwatering ingredients and the quality of the cooking. Venison carpaccio with fresh truffles, jugged *chamois* with red cabbage: it's a bit like taking refuge in a Lake District bothy and discovering Tom Kerridge in the corner, pan-frying Herdwick lamb on a primus stove.





# Kitzbühel, Austria

## Why is it one of the best?

Stylish, historic and — in places — utterly heroic: why aren't more ski resorts like Kitzbühel?

## What's the skiing like?

Don't be fooled by the fearsome reputation of the Hahnenkamm. The north face of the famous 'Hen's Comb' may host the scariest of all downhill races, but elsewhere, the slopes above this former mining town are much less do-or-die. Expect spirited, mostly mid-level pistes that zigzag along a 17km ridge towards the relatively high and cold Resterhöhe, at the southern

end of the ski area. Meanwhile, in hidden valleys, such as the Saukasertal, a vast expanse of off-piste terrain beckons, whenever Mother Nature delivers the right conditions.

## How reliable is the snow?

Its position, near the northern edge of the Tirolean Alps, means Kitzbühel gets a lot of snow. About 90% of its pistes are backed up by snow cannons, but with a lift system that tops out at just 2,000 metres, the quality of its cover suffers whenever there's a drought. Ski here in January or early February for the best chance of soft, cold and grippy pistes.

## What's the vibe?

Kitz is the kind of Alpine town we Brits dream of, but rarely find: cute, chic and

historic, with a proper pub (the Londoner) on hand for those moments when you want to thrash your limbs off to live music. Some of Austria's best mountain food is on offer here, too — from the hearty local version of bubble and squeak, *Tiroler Gröstl*, in the Staudachstub'n (staudach stubn.at) to Catalan lobster salad in Sonnühel (www.sonnuehel.at).

## And the accommodation?

Keen skiers should book one of the neat, well-run four-stars next door to the main Hahnenkamm lift, so they can be first to the snow each morning. With Snow Wise, a week at the four-star Schweizerhof starts at £1,395pp, with flights (snow-wise.com).





child-friendly is it?  
ing childcare isn't an issue here,  
se ski lessons last all day. The  
ment 3 ski school is the elite  
Home to many of the best  
instructors, it guarantees  
imum class size of six  
5-hour sessions cost £284;  
ment 3.at). Its nursery slopes are  
close to the Schweizerhof hotel.

can you do besides skiing?  
ian curling is a less technical  
ore relaxed version of the  
pic sport — and a great way  
ep your group laughing once  
off the slopes. At the indoor  
park in town, up to 10 can  
tane on the ice for £100 an  
sportpark-kitzbuehel.com).



## Tignes, France

### Why is it one of the best?

There are slopes for all sorts in this snowsure resort. Mixed-ability groups won't find a better Easter playground.

### What's the skiing like?

Tignes is a great all-rounder. Steady, ego-boosting pistes; wide-open powderfields; tight and scary chutes — they're all here, and the quality of runs is world-class. The only drawback is the lack of trees (they add definition in poor light) — when clouds come down it's like skiing through milk.

### How reliable is the snow?

Very — at the top, you're skiing on a glacier. Lower, when spring thaws bite, the slopes warm up at different times of the day, so you can follow the sun, hitting slopes before the snow softens.

### What's the vibe?

It's BBC's *Ski Sunday* meets Arctic research station. This is a high, remote spot, made for anyone who wants to ski hard amid spectacular scenery.

### And the accommodation?

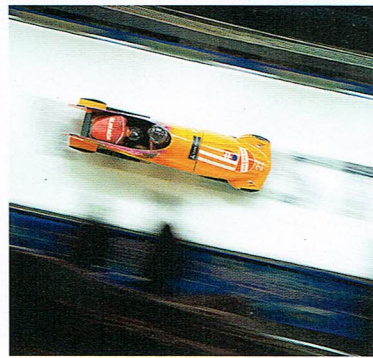
Of the resort's five villages, Tignes-le-Lac is the hub. Here, the ski-in-ski-out Village Montana apartments (pictured) have their own restaurants and spa. Ski Collection has a week from £274pp, self-catering, with Eurotunnel crossings, for four sharing (skicollection.co.uk).

### How child-friendly is it?

The Ecole du Ski Français has one of the biggest and best kindergartens for young, first-time skiers (esf-tignes.com) and is only a short walk from Mark Warner's family-friendly Chalet-Hotel l'Aiguille Percée (markwarner.co.uk).

### What can you do besides skiing?

Le Lagon is the main non-skiing asset. Its indoor pool with slide is a godsend on bad-weather days (tignes.net).



## Whistler, Canada

### Why is it one of the best?

It's the king of the North American ski scene. Think big mountains, giant snowstorms and epic weekend parties.

### What's the skiing like?

Whistler's lift system has tamed two mountains, and they serve up tight, rock-walled chutes, forest glades, intermediate pistes and five sculpted snowparks of jumps, rails and bumps. Everyone is catered for, on a scale that matches the big ski areas of the Alps.

### How reliable is the snow?

Whistler's weak spot is its climate. Often it delivers back-to-back blizzards, dumping three or four metres of snow in a month. But sudden thaws can also turn half the ski area slushy overnight. When that happens, stay high — using the Peak 2 Peak gondola to flit between the top halves of both mountains.

### What's the vibe?

From the size of the ski area to the cavernous mountain restaurants and the sprawling town at its base, Whistler is a wintersports behemoth with the party-hard personality to match.

### And the accommodation?

The Chateau Whistler is a super-sized slopeside property brimming with friendly staff and a fun, outdoor pool area. With Inghams, one week starts at £1,288pp, room only, with flights (ingham.co.uk).

### How child-friendly is it?

Whistler is eight time zones away. Wait 'til they're teenagers.

### What can you do besides skiing?

A biathlon lesson in the Olympic Park gives mind and body a workout, as you combine cross-country skiing with blasting away at targets with a rifle (£24; whistlersportlegacies.com).

# SKI!



## SKILIKE A LOCAL

Mark Freeman,  
a football coach and  
ski instructor in  
Whistler

'As I work all autumn as a coach, I can't wait to get up into the mountains as soon as I can. But I know plenty of people who'll spend their winters without clipping on a ski as there's such a lot else to do here. If you want a bit of adrenaline, and some awesome mountain views, the zipline (whistler.ziptrek.com) above Fitzsimmons Creek is a must. Another heart-thumper is bobsleighbing with a professional driver at the Olympic Sliding Centre (whistlersportlegacies.com). Or pelt downhill at 95kph with your chin centimetres from the ice on a skeleton sled. For something less nerve-jangling, the Scandinavespa (whistler.com/scandinave) is my favourite, with saunas and heated outdoor pools from where you can watch the sun set over the mountains. Follow it up with a moonlit, horse-drawn sleigh ride (whistler.com/activities/sleighrides) and stop for hot chocolate at a cabin en route. Very cosy.'