

Travel Ski special

Skip the crowded slopes of the glamorous big hitters in favour of one of these alternative resorts that will quickly win you over. *By Alex Cody*

GRESSONEY ... NOT VERBIER

Monterosa Ski, in Italy, is the most exciting winter-sports area you've never heard of. A giant stretch of hell-for-leather terrain tumbling down from the Swiss border, it offers the same superb lift-serviced descents as Verbier, but with none of the social cachet and hardly any of the après-ski. Experts love it: there are no hungover hoorays to clutter up the slopes and heli-skiing is a snip compared with Swiss prices (from £225pp a day v £377pp in Verbier; guidemonterosa.com). There are three valleys to choose from, with Gressoney, in the middle, the best place to mix piste skiing with powder. Here, Inghams has a week at the Hotel Dufour from £750pp, half-board, including return flights and transfers (ingham.co.uk).

Those in search of a purer off-piste experience should target Alagna, next door, where James Orr Heliiski has four days of guided skiing, with two helidrops, from £1,745pp, B&B, excluding flights to Milan (heliiski.co.uk).

CANAZEI ... NOT COURCHEVEL

For five-star ski hotels, there's nowhere quite like Courchevel: 19 of them dot the gazillionaire-friendly French resort. But if you're looking for a ski area that can match its broad, steady, ego-boosting pistes and has great food to boot, Canazei, part of Italy's vast Dolomiti Superski area, is the perfect fit. Yes, the alpine



HOT TODDY The après scene

intermediate pistes its strongest suit. There's also plenty of off-piste – notably on the Piz Val Gronda, where the slopes offer everything from (relatively) easy powder fields to stomach-churning chutes. Back at base, the après-ski starts early at the Trofana Alm – a two-storey party barn that is buzzing at 5pm – and finishes well after midnight in bars such as Feuer & Ice and Paucha. A week at Ski Total's popular chalet-hotel Abendrot starts at £809pp, chalet-board, including flights and transfers (skitotal.com).

MADONNA DI CAMPIGNO

CHANGE DIRE



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ISCHGL

... NOT MERIBEL

The Méribel mix of groomed snow, powder and buzzing après-ski has long made it a stalwart of the British ski scene. Ischgl, in Austria, attracts fun-loving Bavarians and Berliners for much the same reason. Its lift system lassoes a sizeable area of broad and steady slopes, with red-rated

party barn that is buzzing at 5pm – and finishes well after midnight in bars such as Feuer & Ice and Pacha. A week at Ski Total's popular chalet-hotel Abendrot starts at £809pp, chalet-board, including flights and transfers (skitotal.com).

MADONNA DI CAMPIGLIO

... NOT VAL D'ISERE

OK, so it's not the same kind of chic. In Val, you get champagne and canapés in your luxury chalet before dinner; in Campiglio, it's a glass of Trentodoc Spumante during the evening *passaggiata*. But, just as in Val, this spectacular Italian resort likes its skiing steep. Three black-rated pistes in particular will get the adrenaline pumping. The Miramonti and Spinale Direttissima pistes drop you back into town down near-vertical final sections. At the other end of the ski area, the

Dolomitica is a gorgeous, sustained descent that keeps going for turn after swooping turn through 4,300 vertical feet. A week at the Biohotel Hermitage starts at £1,395pp, half-board, including

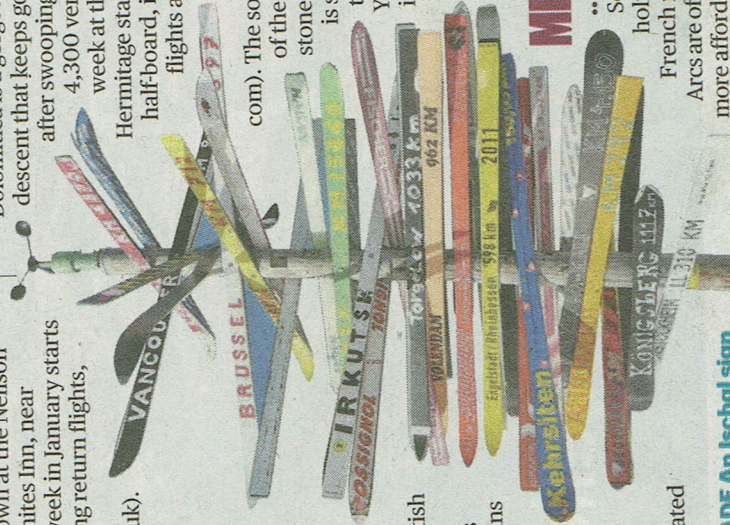
flights and transfers, with Snowwise (snow-wise.com). The soothing smell

of the hotel's stone-pine panelling is said to lower the heart rate. You might need it after a day or two here.

LES MENUIRES

... NOT LES ARCS

Self-catering holidays in the French resort of Les Arcs are often seen as a more affordable and



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intermediate-friendly alternative to its glitzy neighbours in the Three Valleys. And with good reason, given its many ski-in, ski-out blocks of flats and the welcoming embrace of its wide, steady slopes. But let's not forget that Les Trois Vallées have their own bargain basement: Les Menuires. Admittedly, the density of the resort's multistorey architecture makes it hard to admire, but, with 372 miles of piste on offer, the skiing is more than a match for its rival. The resort is family-friendly, too: book an apartment at Les Clarines and you get access to a pool, a giant soft-play area, a sports hall and the longest track-mounted sled ride in the French Alps. A week starts at £332pp, based on four sharing a two-room apartment (skicollection.co.uk).



MAYRHOFEN ... NOT WHISTLER

There's something for everyone in the Canadian resort of Whistler, and nowhere in Europe can quite match its range of terrain in one single top-to-bottom descent. That said, if you don't mind the occasional day trip from your base, you'll find that the Zillertal region, in Austria, has even more variety. Spirited, party-loving Mayrhofen is the valley's hub, offering everything from the sheer, nerve-shredding Harakiri piste (the steepest black in Austria) to the flattish Ahorn plateau. Nearby, freeride-friendly Hochfugen will excite off-pisters, while the Hintertux glacier guarantees top-quality, intermediate-friendly snow. Fly to Innsbruck with British Airways or easyJet, hire a car (from £145 a week through carrentals.co.uk) and bunk down in an apartment at the central Alpenresort Thanner (from 320pp a week, self-catering, based on four sharing: alpenresort-thanner.at). A single £270 lift pass unlocks the entire valley.

JACKSON HOLE ... NOT ST ANTON

Crikey, it's a long way to go. But few advanced or expert skiers come back from the American resort of Jackson Hole disappointed. A wall of Wyoming mountains drops towards the Snake River Valley with barely a pause for breath – and almost every scrap of terrain, on piste or off, is protected against avalanches by pre-emptive blasting, so you don't need a guide or safety gear to explore it. Add one of the highest snowfall averages in the Rockies (38ft a season),

Continued on page 8 →

CARVE IT UP
Hitting the slopes in Canazei, above. Right.



FOXTON-ROLFO BRENNER

