



WINTER SPORTS CHECKLIST

Be Safe on the Slopes

Planning a winter ski or snowboarding holiday? Don't miss out on the fun – avoid injury and expensive medical costs by following our checklist.

Before You Go

Travel insurance

Make sure your insurance covers the activities you want to do. Medical costs can be very expensive if you get injured: for example, it could cost up to £40,000 to be treated for a fractured femur in the United States, or £8,000 to treat a knee injury in Austria*. In addition to this, many policies don't cover damage of rental equipment or skiing off piste without a guide. So it's worth checking your policy!

*Figures include medical fees and repatriation. Source: Europ Assistance

European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)

Travelling in Europe? It's essential that you take a valid EHIC with you. If you have an accident or suddenly become ill you'll receive the necessary state-provided medical healthcare at reduced cost, or sometimes free. The EHIC is valid in the European Economic Area and Switzerland. But you still need to take out travel insurance, as an EHIC won't cover all your medical costs, private treatment or repatriation to the UK. Many travel insurance policies only provide full cover if you also have an EHIC. Apply for your free EHIC now at: www.ehic.org.uk

Be at your peak

Get fit so you can enjoy your holiday more; if you're not physically prepared you're more likely to injure yourself and you won't get the most out of your skiing or snowboarding.

Also, be aware that you are exerting considerable energy at high altitudes and it's unlikely you'll be fully acclimatised, even at the end of your holiday. The highest skiable altitude in many



resorts is up to two miles above sea level, so the air pressure and density is far lower than your body is used to. This can lead to your body tiring faster than usual because it can't absorb as much oxygen. The air is also much dryer than it is at, or near, sea level. It's important to drink a lot of liquids (not alcohol!) to maintain your hydration levels. Depending on your size, weight and the level of exertion, you will need between four and six litres of water a day – a gallon or more.

Know your limits

Drinking alcohol on the slopes invalidates some insurance policies and can affect you more quickly at high altitudes. It also affects your resistance to, and awareness of, the cold which can put you in danger. In practical terms it also affects your judgement, co-ordination and reaction times; in other words, your skiing will deteriorate after you've been drinking.

Use of helmets

Wearing a helmet is a personal choice and more and more people are choosing to wear them. In some resorts it is a legal requirement for children to wear helmets. Before you travel you should ensure that you are aware of the legal requirements for the country you are visiting. For more information visit:
www.skiclub.co.uk/infoandvice

Sun/Snow blindness

The sun is much stronger at altitude and appropriate strength sun cream should be worn. When it comes to eye protection there are two main options; ski goggles or sunglasses, each has their own benefits and disadvantages. Always ensure goggles or glasses offer 100% UV protection. More information can be found at:
www.skiclub.co.uk/infoandvice

Check www.fco.gov.uk/travel before you go

For the latest country travel advice, tips and winter sports information, visit the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's website at www.fco.gov.uk/travel or call 0845 850 2829.

In Resort

Choosing the right pistes

It is important to be aware of how pistes are classified to indicate their difficulty. This will make sure you don't overstretch yourself and get into a tricky situation.

It is useful to note that there can be local and national variations in signs, rules and regulations. When you arrive in a resort, you should obtain and study the piste/trail map of the area.

Do be aware that piste classifications vary in different ski resorts and countries. Piste conditions change during the day as the sun moves and warms up the snow especially later in the season. What was a cruising blue run mid morning, could be difficult, and more like a hard red by 4pm. Note that this also works in reverse, and sometimes a quiet red at the end of the day may be a lot easier than an icy and crowded blue.

Safety on the piste

The International Ski Federation's rules of conduct

For all mountain users, the International Ski Federation (FIS) has ten rules for skiers/snowboarders to help everyone stay safe on the slopes. They should be followed at all times.



These are the ten FIS Rules of Conduct:

1. Respect: Do not endanger others.
2. Control: Adapt the manner and speed of your skiing to your ability and to the general conditions on the mountain.
3. Choice of route: The skier/snowboarder in front has priority - leave enough space.
4. Overtaking: Leave plenty of space when overtaking a slower skier/snowboarder.
5. Entering and starting: Look up and down the mountain each time before starting or entering a marked run.
6. Stopping: Only stop at the edge of the piste or where you can easily be seen.
7. Climbing: When climbing up or down, always keep to the side of the piste.
8. Signs: Obey all signs and markings - they are there for your safety.
9. Assistance: In case of accidents provide help and alert the rescue service.
10. Identification: All those involved in an accident, including witnesses, should exchange names and addresses.

If you are unfortunate to be injured in an accident or witness an accident, there are a few pointers which will help:

Assisting in case of an accident

- Secure the accident area
- Protect with crossed skis or planted snowboard above the injured person. If necessary post someone to give warning

First Aid - assess the general condition of the casualty

- Airway - check it is clear
- Breathing - check for breathing
- Circulation - check for pulse. Cover any wound and apply firm pressure
- Provide warmth - give nothing to eat or drink, especially alcohol

Alert the rescue service

- Place of accident (piste name and nearest piste marker)
- Number of people injured
- Type of injury

Establish the facts of the accident

- Names and addresses of people involved and of witnesses
- Place, time and circumstances of accident
- Terrain, snow conditions and visibility
- Markings and signs
- Report to the police as soon as possible

Off-piste safety

Off-piste skiing and snowboarding has become more and more popular in recent years with the attraction of heading off the marked runs and seeking out fresh powder. However, until you are trained and very experienced, it is sensible to go with a group led by a professional guide.

If you do decide to head off-piste, you need to make sure you are fully prepared and equipped. This means carrying the appropriate equipment - at least an avalanche transceiver, a probe pole and a shovel; there are also inflatable 'floatation' devices available, and you will need a fully charged phone that operates in the country you are in with the necessary emergency numbers. You must know how to use the equipment correctly, know the avalanche risk grading for the day (as published by the piste authorities) and gather information on the area so you know where you are at all times and how to get back to patrolled areas. You must be able to identify potentially risky areas on the route you are taking. When you are off piste, you should not only consider avalanche risk, but also bear in mind rocks, trees, cliffs, ravines, crevasses and other hazards.



On longer excursions you need to consult the weather forecasts against the possibility of changes and carry food and drink and extra clothing sufficient for the time you will be away. You must let someone in resort know where you are going and when you intend to return. They should be prepared to brief the rescue authorities if it is suspected that you have got into difficulties.

You may also encounter 'itineraries'. These are runs that are marked on the piste map by a dashed line and on the ground by yellow or day-glo orange signs, but they are not groomed or patrolled. Itinerary runs can often be as hard as riding or skiing off piste and you must use them with care.

And don't forget that many insurance policies won't cover you for damage of rental equipment or skiing off piste without a guide. So make sure you check your policy!

Avalanche awareness

For more information on avalanche awareness (or find out how to be avalanche aware) visit: www.skiclub.co.uk/infoandadvice

Useful Information

You can get information about snow stability from avalanche forecasts. Reading or listening to the avalanche forecast is essential to understand the risks for the day. It will include a danger rating, usually on a 5-point scale. You must understand the definition for the rating. You also need to get an idea of how unstable the snow is and where the instability tends to be most acute on that particular day. Many factors, including snow layers, temperature history and wind direction affect this. The experts take daily snow sections and samples.

You should ask local professionals especially if in an area that you don't know very well. Even off-piste and avalanche experts need local knowledge if they are in a new place, or if they are in a familiar place, but haven't been there for a few days.

Recent avalanche activity is a great clue. If lots of slopes facing one direction and at the same altitude have recent slab avalanches on them, then that's a clue that similar slopes probably have some instability on them.

There are national organisations in most countries who supply a daily avalanche forecast. These are a good resource both for checking current conditions and avalanche warning levels, but also to gather historical information.

Scotland – Sport Scotland Avalanche Information Service - www.sais.gov.uk

Switzerland - Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research SLF www.slf.ch

Austria - www.lawine.at

France - www.france.meteofrance.com

Norway - www.ngi.no/no/snoskred

The SLF (Swiss Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research) website, www.avalanche.org is a useful resource for finding out more about avalanche awareness as well as reading avalanche bulletins (current and historical) and avalanche statistics. A lot of their information is in English.

Equipment and clothing

A comprehensive guide on appropriate eyewear, ski and snowboard clothing and equipment can be found at: www.skiclub.co.uk/infoandadvice

