



Photo: Patrice Mestari/Courchevel

RESORT INSIDER

The path to piste perfection

Words by Ben Clatworthy, Chris Madoc-Jones, Lou Hall, Colin Nicholson, Sheila Reid

Ah the joy! Few experiences can rival the sensation of feeling freshly groomed, corduroy snow under your skis and hearing your boots squeak with delight as you speed down a piste on a crisp, bluebird day. It's what ski areas are made for, and it's the allure of such runs that keeps us coming back for more.

These days lapping the groomers is easier and more pleasurable than ever before. Resorts continue to build new, faster chairlifts and gondolas, giving us more time on the slopes, less time queuing and greater potential to explore the nooks and crannies, villages and restaurants of our chosen destination.

In many cases, these new lifts link previously unconnected resorts to create huge new ski areas. And even where the nearest resort is a short bus or train ride away, newly expanded lift pass deals mean you can often explore them all on one pass. The result? Say goodbye to skiing the same run twice (well, almost).

As in the past two issues on these pages, *Ski+board* is focusing solely on those resorts that have invested in new lifts for this season. In some cases, this has also allowed them to open up new runs, making them better than ever for piste skiers. All the resorts featured cater to those looking for manicured terrain. For novice skiers, of course, smooth groomers are where it all begins to come together. But for more experienced skiers too, pistes are where you can really hone your technique. Ask any ski instructor and they'll tell you

that most advanced skiers could do with spending more time on groomers, brushing up on their basic skills.

In the next issue, *Ski+board* will focus on those resorts — again with new lifts — that best suit skiers or snowboarders on a tight budget.

 Find an extensive list of resorts worldwide, with impartial reviews, at skiclub.co.uk/ski-resorts

HOW OUR GUIDE WORKS



CHALLENGE Our infographic shows how resorts grade pistes according to difficulty, showing what percentage are black, red, blue or green. However, note that Austrian, Swiss and some Italian areas don't have green runs. We list the percentage by kilometre.

PISTES We list the combined length of all the resort's pistes, as claimed by the tourist office. We include linked areas that are also covered by the lift pass.

LIFT PASS Prices are for a peak season six-day pass.

SKI CLUB Ski with other Ski Club members where there is a Freshtracks holiday 'F', Leaders 'L', or Instructor-led Guiding 'ILG'. Note that for Samoëns they are in the linked resort of Flaine.   

Photo: Alexis Cornu/Courchevel

Courchevel

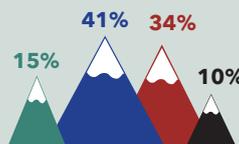


Piste height 1,100m-3,265m / Lift pass £266 / Lifts 166 / Pistes 600km

Why there? Courchevel has serious credentials – it is, after all, part of the world’s largest lift-linked ski area. Courchevel 1650 – now called Courchevel Moriond – is a good family base with easy-to-access slopes and better value accommodation than in upmarket Courchevel 1850. This summer the area was bolstered by the installation of the €18.6 million, eight-seat Ariondaz gondola, which has doubled the uphill capacity despite the removal of two draglifts.

There’s a huge variety of slopes, and for intermediates it’s a good day trip from Courchevel over to Val Thorens, Les Menuires and St Martin de Belleville in the third valley. The latter makes a good lunch stop for high-mileage skiers (try Restaurant L’Eterlou at the bottom of the slopes or La Voute in the village). But even if you don’t leave the Courchevel valley all week, there are enough runs to allow all levels of skier to feel as if they’ve travelled a fair distance in a day. Intermediates will love the fast motorway reds, especially the runs that descend from the Saulire sector.

For families with young skiers, the area around Courchevel 1650 is great, with a good network of gentle blues and greens, including the Indiens piste, with its tepees and fun bumps route through the forest. **Can’t ski, won’t ski:** Aquamotion is a futuristic sports centre with myriad pools and slides for children plus an indoor surfing wave, steam room and saunas. There are also lots of good snowshoe trails, winter walking paths in the forest and dog sledding outings. In Courchevel 1850 there is an ice-skating rink and a clutch of swanky shops.



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| Lifts | ❄️❄️❄️❄️❄️ |
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| Ski schools | ❄️❄️❄️❄️❄️ |
| Low budget | ❄️❄️❄️❄️❄️ |
| Off-piste | ❄️❄️❄️❄️❄️ |

- ➕ Extensive, varied slopes with snowmaking
- ➕ Big investment in the lift system
- ➕ Wooded areas for poor weather days
- ➖ High prices in 1850 and all mountain restaurants
- ➖ Very little village charm or French atmosphere
- ➖ The villages are too spread out for lively après-ski fun

Photo: Val Gardena
Photo: Dietmar Sochor/Osterreich Werbung

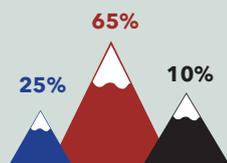
Val Gardena



Piste height 1,235m-2,500m / Lift pass £220 / Lifts 78 / Pistes 175km

Why there? The main draw is access to the magnificent Sella Ronda circuit, and this year that is easier thanks to the replacement of the Piz Seteur chairlift with a new ten-seat gondola capable of transporting 3,450 skiers per hour. If you’re staying in charming Selva, just down the valley, the new gondola will dramatically reduce queues. The impressive 23km circuit makes a good day trip. It’s all on-piste and the runs tend to be well groomed each night. The area is a stellar choice in lean snow years due to formidable snowmaking.

Can’t ski, won’t ski: Winter walking is popular and there’s a sports centre and ice rink. A bus ride takes you to Bolzano, home to a museum dedicated to Ötzi, the ice man.



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| Off-piste | ❄️❄️❄️❄️❄️ |

- ➕ Excellent slopes amid dramatic Dolomites scenery
- ➖ Sella Ronda circuit can get crowded



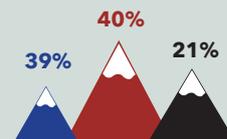
Zell am See-Kaprun



Piste height 760m-3,030m / Lift pass £225 / Lifts 49 / Pistes 138km

Why there? It’s different to many other Austrian resorts as it’s a proper town on a stunning lakeside. At 760m, it’s low, but that isn’t too problematic since 12 minutes’ drive up the road you reach Kaprun with its high, snowsure glacier slopes. Most of the pistes there are blue or red. In Zell this season, a new ten-seat gondola replaces one of the most important access lifts and promises to cut morning queues. Unusually, the slopes plateau at the top and are steeper towards the bottom, but there’s plenty of gentle piste skiing to be had.

Can’t ski, won’t ski: There’s the town to explore, plus plenty of winter walking routes to try, including across the frozen lake. Day trips to Kitzbühel and Salzburg are also possible.



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| Off-piste | ❄️❄️❄️❄️❄️ |

- ➕ Varied wooded slopes with nearby glacier
- ➖ Zell am See’s slopes are low altitude and can be limited



Samoëns



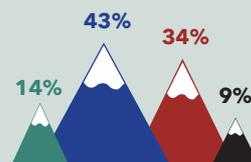
Piste height 760m-2,560m / Lift pass £220 / Lifts 68 / Area 265km

Why there? Samoëns is a safe bet for skiers wanting cruisy blues and unthreatening reds. And this year there's more terrain thanks to the new Coulouvrier chairlift which, despite replacing two old, slow lifts, still increases the skiable area. There's a new blue run, and two reds have been extended, adding variety to the front side of the mountain, as well as reducing queues during peak weeks and at weekends.

It is linked to the Grand Massif ski domain: five resorts with access to 265km of slopes, 80 per cent of which are north facing. The main area is around Flaine which, with its brutalist architecture, is no looker, but has a good snow record and an abundance of slopes suited to good intermediates. Take time to explore the full area: there are good woodland runs about Les Carroz and a fun, winding green down to Morillon. For experts, there is challenging terrain above Flaine, as well as some tricky off-piste routes. A guide is recommended, especially if you're exploring the Flaine bowl – Flaine is where the Ski Club offers its Instructor-led Guiding and Freshtracks trips. Closer to Samoëns, the upper pistes on the Tête des Saix are testing.

Samoëns is a pretty village with small artisan shops that flank the cobbled street and a traditional square. This season a giant new Club Med resort has opened in the Samoëns 1600 area. It's family friendly, with crèches and children's clubs, and an indoor-outdoor pool.

Can't ski, won't ski: You'll want to stay in Samoëns village, as opposed to the new development. Non-ski activities include a sports and culture centre and ice rink, plus marked snowshoe routes and dog sledding.



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| Off-piste | ❄️❄️❄️❄️❄️ |

- ➕ Lovely historic village that's family friendly
- ➕ Suits intermediates wanting cruisy blues and reds
- ➕ Marvellous views from higher up
- ➖ Can't ski back to the village – need to take gondola
- ➖ Nightlife is limited – think rustic charm
- ➖ It's not the best base for complete beginners

Photo: Samoëns

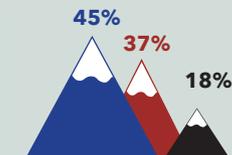
Madonna di Campiglio



Piste height 850m-2,500m / Lift pass £210 / Lifts 60 / Pistes 150km

Why there? Sitting at the head of a wooded valley, Madonna is a charming resort dwarfed by the stunning Dolomites that tower above. It's lift-linked to Folgarida, as well as Marilleva and Pinzolo, and has lovely wide runs that give intermediates a sense of travel. This season, a new six-seat chairlift will reduce queues to the Monte Spolverino sector, which has varied blues and decent reds. There are few blacks – one or two in each area – and many would classify as reds. Most are well groomed if you want to tear around the mountain.

Can't ski, won't ski: Non-skiers are not well catered for. There are excellent winter walking routes, but little else to do. The Oberosler hotel has a good spa.



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| Off-piste | ❄️❄️❄️❄️❄️ |

- ➕ Extensive, varied slopes in stunning Dolomites
- ➖ Not very much to do off the slopes

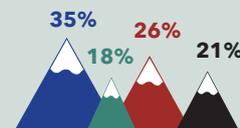
Kvitfjell



Piste height 200m-1,055m / Lift pass £190 / Lifts 12 / Pistes 29km

Why there? You'll be forgiven if you've never heard of this diminutive Norwegian resort. But that's set to change thanks to sizeable investment and the annual hosting of an Alpine World Cup Downhill race. This season, the new Vardan Express six-seater kicks off the resort's expansion, plus there's 5km of new terrain. More slopes and a luxury ski-in, ski-out development are due to be built. That won't be enough for mileage-hungry intermediate and advanced skiers, but for beginners or early intermediates it's a great base with snowsure groomers and quiet areas.

Can't ski, won't ski: Cross-country skiing is high on the agenda, as are dog sledding and saunas. Party animals will find the clutch of bars limiting.



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| Off-piste | ❄️❄️❄️❄️❄️ |

- ➕ More than 100 snow guns help make it snowsure
- ➖ There are a few bars but nightlife is limited

Photo: Carlo Baroni/Madonna di Campiglio
Photo: Kvitfjell

Photo: Stefan Schlumpf/Switzerland Tourism
Photo: Blue Sky Basin/Vail

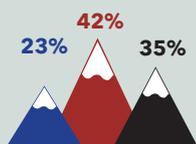
Davos-Klosters



Piste height 1,120m-2,845m / Lift pass £230 / Lifts 57 / Pistes 300km

Why there? Surprisingly low-key for its affluent reputation, traditional Klosters is great for families and couples. The ski area is extensive, as it's linked to Davos, and this year the T-bar to the Furka Pass has been replaced with a high-speed six-seat chairlift halving the journey time. You'll find accessible off-piste, tree-lined runs and sunny mountain restaurants with dramatic views. On piste, there is good cruising in all sectors, with a few reds that, when groomed, are great for speed demons. At the local ski school most instructors speak good English.

Can't ski, won't ski: Take the cable car or winding train for a scenic lunch. There are also hiking trails, cross-country skiing, sledding, tobogganing, swimming and tea rooms.



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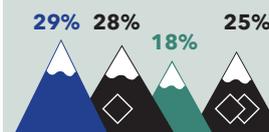
- ➕ Lovely long intermediate runs on extensive slopes
- ➖ Some skiers might find Klosters too quiet

Vail



Height 2,475m-3,525m / Lift pass £620* / Lifts 31 / Terrain 5,289 acres
*based on booking online more than seven days before arrival

Why there? When most Brits think about North American skiing it's all about fluffy powder, but there's plenty of terrain for those who prefer 'tearing up the groomers'. Cruisers will prefer the varied slopes on the front side of the mountain, from easy-learning runs to double-black diamonds, which although often mogulled, are sometimes groomed into fast steps. The Northwoods sector has some of the best terrain for intermediates and benefits this season from a new six-pack helping to ease the daily bottleneck.



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| Off-piste | ❄️❄️❄️❄️❄️ |

- ➕ The massive ski area is great for confident intermediates
- ➖ By American standards, the slopes can be very busy

Can't ski, won't ski: Most non-ski activities involve snow. At Adventure Ridge you can go snowmobiling, fat biking and tubing. A day trip to the shops at Silverthorne is possible.