



# BEYOND THE SNOW

Ski resorts that once only opened in winter are now welcoming tourists in the summer months too – and business is booming

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With cities baking as new temperature records are set each summer, and beach destinations getting too hot to enjoy, mountain resorts that once focused almost exclusively on their winter ski business are finding a whole new identity as the perfect cool-air escape.

As a result, summer mountain tourism in the Alps is thriving, with traditional ski resorts transforming into year-round

destinations. Switzerland recorded a record 23.7 million summer overnight stays in 2024, up from 21.4 million in 2022. Meanwhile, winter sports mecca Austria now earns over 50% of its €29.5 billion (£25.7 billion) annual tourism revenue from summer visitors. In France, the iconic resort of Chamonix has seen summer overnight stays surpass winter for the first time, reaching 4.5 million.

“As holidaymakers look to escape soaring summer temperatures, 2025 has truly been

the summer of the ‘coolcation’. We’ve seen a marked increase in demand for summer holidays in the Alps. Clients are drawn to the fresh mountain air, breathtaking scenery and the opportunity to enjoy luxury chalets with private wellness facilities, outdoor adventures and gourmet dining in a more comfortable climate,” says Alison Willis, managing director of Peak Retreats, a company that specialises in holidays to less well-known French mountain destinations.





One of the most popular is the “mountain coasters”, an exciting kind of downhill rollercoaster. There are also zip wires, giant swings you sail out on over the mountainside and precipitous platforms over cliff tops to test visitors’ heads for heights.

Chamonix has taken things further with a glass box called Step into the Void, suspended about 2,500 metres above the valley floor at its Aiguille du Midi mountain station, the same building from which the world’s longest ski run, the 20km Vallée Blanche, begins in winter. Other resorts, including Glacier 3000 near Switzerland’s Gstaad, have opted for high altitude swinging pedestrian bridges suspended between mountain tops.

You can even make like James Bond by riding up the mountain on the roof of a cable car, in locations including Austria’s Dachstein Glacier, Snowbird in Utah and Tignes in the French Alps. You don’t quite have to cling on as you’re safe within a “balcony” with solid sides attached to the roof, but it’s very bracing.

French mountain resort La Plagne has opted for two open-air gondola cabins (meaning the usual glass walls have been removed) in an experience called Aérolive. Taking roped-in passengers up from Roche de Mio to the resort’s highest point at 3,080 metres, passengers can literally “hang out”

hundreds of metres above the ground and enjoy spectacular views.

The luxury summer mountain market is booming and growing year on year as a global destination. Families who once thought of the Alps only for skiing are now booking for hiking, e-biking, wine tours and wellness retreats.

Chris Thompson, director of high-end chalet specialist OVO Network, says: “The Alps offer an unrivalled opportunity to disconnect and escape the everyday routine in summer and winter. Peaceful mountain chalets surrounded by nature offer the chance to unwind, relax and enjoy precious time with family and friends.

“The same ski chalets that are so enticing buried in snow, located in or near authentic mountain resorts, offer genuine Alpine charm throughout the year, but take on a different aspect in the summer months, with the surrounding countryside turning from white to green, window boxes on balconies filled with Alpine flowers and birdsong in the air.

“Each chalet has been hand-picked by us for its style and facilities, such as swimming pools, hot tubs, home cinemas and professional kitchens. We also work with private chefs, who can be pre-booked, or there are plenty of restaurants to discover in the mountains – including around Lake Annecy, where the restaurants have a combined 13 Michelin stars.”

Resorts are reinventing themselves. For instance, St Moritz now hosts high-end cultural festivals and gourmet weekends in summer, while the chic French resort of Megève, established as a ski destination by the Rothschilds, offers world-class cycling routes and horse-riding trails.

Of course, you can still ski, too. Summer glacier skiing, though greatly reduced over the past few decades, is still possible at a dozen or so resorts in the Alps. The safest bet is Switzerland’s Zermatt, which maintains 10 miles or so of runs, Europe’s highest at nearly 3,900 metres, right next to the awe-inspiring Matterhorn.

The idea of an “off season” between winter and summer markets is also disappearing, with the best mountain chalets and hotels working to two six-month cycles, adapting to summer guests and flipping to winter when the seasons change.

Indeed, fears that ski resorts would go out of business as climate change makes winter snow cover less predictable seem to have been offset by their growing desirability as purveyors of cooler summer air. Wellness tourism, family-friendly activities and climate-conscious travel drive the growth.

There’s also a lot of investment under way to add more summer attractions, diversifying away from overreliance on winter business. Ski lifts are being repurposed for summer use, not just as an easy way to get to the top of the mountain and hike or mountain bike back down, but to access a plethora of new attractions. Many of these are as thrilling as skiing in winter and, in many cases, now operate year-round.

