

EUROPE'S BEST SPRING SKI RESORTS

LONGER DAYS, QUIETER SLOPES & BETTER DEALS

When it comes to pure relaxation and joy, it's hard to beat springtime in the mountains. The days are long, the slopes are quiet, the mood is laid-back and prices are some of the best they've been all season.

"Spring skiing can be overlooked in the countdown to summer, but it's the perfect opportunity to squeeze in one last ski before the lifts close, with quieter slopes and longer, sunny days. On top of that, prices in spring are significantly cheaper than the peak weeks. Add to this the fact that many resorts offer discounted prices on spring lift passes, and skiers can enjoy exceptional value for money as well as a last ski of the season," says Chris Thompson, director of OVO Network UK. But for the most memorable holiday, for the right reasons, spring ski trips do need a little planning, if you want to make the best of the late season opportunities and everything else your chosen resort has to offer.

THE SNOW

With springtime temperatures typically warmer in spring than earlier in the season (although you never know...), it's important to choose a resort that's got plenty of high-altitude terrain. That's ideally lots above 1,800m if we're talking about the Alps, with glacier access a bonus. Alternatively, you can head to a northerly latitude in Scandinavia or Canada where altitude is less of a factor, as winter lingers longer further north anyway. Wherever you choose, though, it's likely you'll encounter freeze-thaw conditions as daytime temperatures climb higher in the afternoons, even at high altitude, meaning it's important to get out on the slopes early to enjoy the best conditions in the morning. Then perhaps a long, late lunch in a sunny mountain terrace and maybe another activity like hiking, biking or just a trip to the spas during the long afternoon daylight hours. Of course, springtime can still be quite wintery, and recent years have seen some

of the biggest snowfalls of the season in March and April, so you never know. They're also the months when, typically, base depths reach their maximum before the thaw sets in, so it's likely ski resorts will be close to full operations – often with more slopes open than in December and January.

THE DEALS

As our minds transform to warm weather thoughts in springtime, ski resorts and tour operators battle to keep their hotels and ski slopes occupied. One way they do that is to organise lots of activities like music festivals and fun events in the snow; another is to cut prices.

"Travelling in April represents excellent value for money; the slopes are generally a lot quieter and we've seen incredible conditions in recent years. You can save up to 70% on a stay in Plagne Soleil for the week commencing 11th April vs half-term week this spring, for example," says Nicola Moss of French ski specialists Peak Retreats. It's not just the cost of your holiday package, though. Resorts often have deals on ski passes, common ones (besides a straight price cut, or bonus free days) being free places for children right up to age 16 or free lift passes when you book accommodation direct. That's even been spun around sometime with Tignes one resort offering free apartment accommodation when you buy a lift pass in late April in years past. Independent travellers will normally find cheaper travel costs too and of course less crowded airports. And if you want to buy new ski gear for the winters ahead, there's no better time than the end-of-season clear-outs in the ski shops! All in all, spring skiing blends long, sunlit days with reliably cold nights that keep the snow in great shape. As temperatures rise, the mountains relax: softer turns, quieter slopes and a festive, almost beach-day energy on the mountain terraces. It's a sweet spot in the season where good snow, good weather and good value line up beautifully.

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