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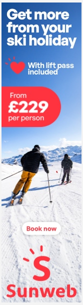

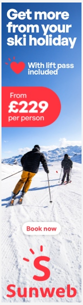

The Rail Deal | A Family Ski Holiday by Train

For years Jim Walker had assumed flying to Geneva was “just easier”. But his family’s first train trip to the Alps proved to be a game changer.

Tignes ski resort. Photo: iStock

Written by: Jim Walker

Last Updated: 26 Jan 2026

We are four hours into the five-hour train journey from Paris Gare du Lyon to Bourg St Maurice. My wife Issy, daughters Libby, 11, and Rosie, seven, and I are happily playing a game of travel Monopoly round the table. I pause for a moment as I realise that throughout this whole journey the kids haven’t bickered once, and nobody has thrown a tantrum. Instead, we have played games together and spent time looking out of the window, chatting about the ever-evolving landscapes—from suburbs to pretty farming villages, and from spring meadows to the snowcapped peaks of the Alps. These are just coming into view, adding to the sense of excitement in our corner of carriage.

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I have been skiing for 26 years and have visited over 50 resorts. For the last decade I have been promising myself that I would travel by train for environmental reasons. But much like dozens of people I have spoken to before and after my trip, I’ve always backed out and taken the “easy” option of flying, even if it feels like a deal with the devil. You know you’ll stand in queues for baggage, passport control, and security before being herded into some weird sort of temporary structure, and being made to wait some more, before they cram you onto a bus. You know it will take two hours to get onto the plane, squeezing yourself and your hand luggage into spaces calculated to the millimetre to fit as many people in as possible. You know it will take another hour at the other end, collecting bags and sorting car hire (if you’re lucky). And yet somehow, you do it anyway.

Photo: Andrei Antipov

> **“Club Med reported a 100 percent jump in train bookings last winter”**

Perhaps it’s a case of better the devil you know, but whatever the reason, the numbers of British skiers flying each winter still vastly outweighs those taking the train, with most reports suggesting the ratio is 98 vs. two percent. These numbers are beginning to change though. Club Med reported a 100 percent jump in train bookings for their 2023-24 season and Inghams reported a 90 percent year-on-year increase for the same period. Admittedly, these numbers are starting from a low base, but they indicate a direction of travel, if you’ll excuse the pun.

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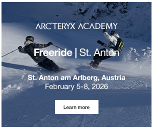
The biggest driver of this increase—and the main motivator for us as a family—is the massive environmental impact of flying. The respected website snowcarbon.co.uk calculates that a flight and transfer from London to Tignes creates more than five times the emissions of a train and taxi. To put that into context, the average family car doing 8,000 miles a year emits 2,200kg of C02e, according to **ecoski.co.uk**, and a return flight from Bristol to Geneva for a family of four is 828kg. That means replacing one return flight to Europe with a rail journey could save over 30 percent of your car’s damaging emissions annually. The costs are also comparable when you factor in luggage, skis and car hire or transfers. So why aren’t the numbers rising even faster?

Firstly, the booking process is genuinely confusing, particularly when you try to combine your journey with Eurostar and TGV, and add stops along the way. Added to that is the hassle of travelling across Paris from Gare du Nord to Gare du Lyon and the perceived longer journey time. I will admit I spent several long internet sessions trying to plan it myself, and very nearly gave up, before discovering Rail Europe [see boxout]. Their service is effectively to take your requirements and do the booking for you.

Photo: Jim Walker

With Easter falling late in the 2025 season, I told Rail Europe we wanted to go to Tignes, for its high-altitude, snow sure slopes. I also requested stops in Paris for a night on the way, and another night on the way back to break the journey up for the kids, avoid the cross-Paris slog with our bags, and give non-skiing Issy something more than just a week in a resort. In the end, we have 17 tickets for our journey—not easy to book independently—but with these in hand, the journey itself couldn't have been smoother.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On arrival at Kings Cross we are greeted with a small queue to get through customs, followed by an immediate check-in at French customs. This means you simply disembark in Paris and you're free to go—saving a full leg of standing in line with frustrated children (and, worse, frustrated adults) at the other end. There is a short wait before we can get on the train but it's a stress-free experience compared to any UK airport I've flown out of.

Café de Flore
CAFE DE FLORE

Photo: Jerome Labouyrie

As we approach the train, the friendly platform attendant offers to take a family photo, and we rid ourselves of cases and head for our Eurostar Plus seats—which we managed to upgrade for just £15 per person. This means not only bigger berths, but a full three-course meal with drinks delivered to your table. Cue huge excitement for the kids, and a very happy wife. The journey goes by in a flash, and two hours later we simply wander off the train and straight into central Paris, feeling almost stunned at how easy and pleasant everything has been.

We spend a lovely night in the Relais district of Paris, dining al fresco in the warm spring weather and taking a stroll along the Seine to the Louvre. The following morning we head to the Gare du Lyon. On this stretch, I'm reminded just how amazing French trains are. We have taken seats on the upper deck, giving us spectacular views of the aforementioned countryside. The on-board café serves a good selection of food and drinks, and the children love the feeling of freedom, of not being strapped in, of being able to go to the toilet whenever they want and, most importantly, of having chargers for their iPad.

Photo: Peak Retreats

School's out for the winter

The train runs direct from Paris to Bourg St. Maurice, so we arrive feeling fresh and unhassled. From there, a taxi whisks us to our spacious Peak Retreats apartment in Tignes Val Claret. Just a couple of days before, there'd been so much snow that the mayor had issued a stay-at-home order. But by the time we arrive, the pisteurs have done their job, everything's safe, and we're greeted with a lovely mix of pristine, plentiful snow, and warm spring sunshine.

The following morning, we make our way to ski school and the kids begin their lessons, leaving me to head off and explore while Issy happily relaxes with a book in the sun. I chat to a couple on the first lift who, like me, can't believe their luck at the volume of snow that's fallen, and the near empty mountains we have in front of us. I spend an enjoyable few hours finding fresh tracks between the pistes, before meeting the family in Tignes Le Lac for lunch on a suntrap terrace. Post lesson, Rosie refuses to stop skiing, choosing to shout her food order up to the us while continuing to practice on the magic carpet in front of the restaurant. This one's got the bug!

Photo: Jim Walker

Beatrice and Anton, the girls' instructors, help them both make huge progress in their three lessons. By the final afternoon we are all able to ski together. This excites me far more than the girls, who tell me off for going on about how great it is. We manage to ski the Tignes Loop—a route that starts at the Palafour lift and winds around Val Claret via the Merles chair before taking you back down to the other side of Le Lac, where we meet up with Issy for some celebratory après drinks at the Loop Bar. It's the perfect run for the kids. All blues, all in the sunshine and with some stunning views to enjoy.

The following morning, it's a return taxi down the mountain to Moutiers to catch our train back. This time, it includes a change in Chambéry—but that's pretty seamless—and before long we're back in Paris, free to spend another 24 hours exploring the Jardin du Luxembourg and more. I would obviously never have considered a stopover if I was flying, but these short, cultural sojourns have turned out to be a huge highlight—another big tick in the box for the freedom of train travel.

Photo: Jim Walker

> **“We asked the kids what they liked most. Their reply? The train.”**

Our Eurostar return to London is just as comfortable as the outbound leg and, remarkably, the girls are still not bickering or moaning. The whole holiday has been something of a revelation. The journey itself was a genuinely memorable travel experience, and it felt like far more of an adventure, with the family spending quality time together. As we approached home, we asked the kids what their favourite part of the holiday was. Their immediate answer? Taking the train. Enough said.

Snow how

Our Trip

Jim and his family’s trip was supported by the Tignes Tourist Office. You can find loads of information, book accommodation and find lift pass for **Tignes on their website**.

Getting there

Jim’s train travel was booked through **Rail Europe**. The company was founded to simplify cross-border rail travel, and partners with major train operators throughout Europe, so you can easily plan and book your whole journey with a single platform. The customer support is also excellent. Tickets to the Alps via Paris are currently around £900 for a family of four.

Photo: Peak Retreats

Accommodation

Jim and family stayed at the excellent La Nevada apartments, in the centre of Tignes Val Claret. The accommodation is spacious, and includes a balcony in each apartment. There is also an excellent swimming pool, sauna and spa area which is free to use for guests. It was booked through the French Alps specialist and award-winning tour operator **Peak Retreats**, who offer an extensive choice of over 70 resorts, including many that you can access by train and include rail travel in their packages.

Ski School

Jim’s daughters got ski school and ski hire from **Oxygene**. Their instructors were super helpful, patient and spoke excellent English. Private lessons are from €210 (£182) for three hours. Group lessons start from €294 (£255) per week. Oxygene service 16 resorts in the French Alps.

Train vs. Plane: The Breakdown

Cost*

Train - £1,350 including taxis from the train station to resort

Plane - £1,500 including airport parking and luggage costs

Time

Train - You can get from London St Pancras to many resorts in under 9 hours

Plane - Including airport time and transfers you can be in many resorts in under 8 hours

Environmental Impact*

Train – 148kg CO2e including taxi transfers to resort

Plane – 828kg CO2e including taxi transfers to resort

Queues

Train – One hour total: around half an hour for each passport entry leg

Plane – Four hours, including luggage, passport, security and car hire.

*For a family of four from London to Tignes, according to **snowcarbon.co.uk**

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