

MOUNTAIN RESORTS ARE SLOPING OFF

Once mainly the preserve of those looking to race down their slopes, ski resorts are introducing a host of new activities, writes Sarah Lee

It's unusual to find yourself in just a swimsuit at 1,900m in a snowy mountain valley, alabaster white still twinkling as twilight falls and streetlights gleam into life. But with only my head bobbing above the warmth of the pool at my hotel spa in Obergurgl, in Austria's Tirol, the whole experience took on a certain magic.

It isn't the only time I have enjoyed what's becoming known as a winter wonderland break with non-skiers.

At another spa resort in the southern Austrian state of Carinthia, I left the crowded slopes and made for the sauna, and its open-air deck onto an icy Lake Weissensee.

Another time, after the ski hills had closed in Italy's Dolomites, I joined a

skidoo adventure, the wind powering us on under inky skies.

Snowy landscapes hold many adventures for Brits – for whom winter often means grey and drizzly – from life-affirming exhilaration felt partaking in winter sports to serene spa moments. And I know I'm not alone in seeking out ski-adjacent experiences.

IS SKIING ON ICE?

In short, no. According to a 2025 survey conducted by Iglu, hitting the slopes is still the main attraction for its base of dedicated skiers, with value for money the major driver. A smaller share of respondents – 6.2% to be exact – said non-ski options influence their choice of resort, however.

It's a more varied picture for Ski Independence, says Marketing Manager Victoria Mclean: "While we have a very strong core of clients who want to ski all day, they are increasingly seeking other activities."

"There's a portion of clients who don't even want to ski but are seeking winter wonderland experiences to soak up the scenery, clean air and impressive facilities. This is especially true for destinations that are easy to reach from the UK, or where the journey is a key feature of the holiday; Switzerland in particular."

Ski Beat's Sales and Marketing Director Laura Hazell adds: "In the four decades Ski Beat has been hosting guests in slope-side French ski ►

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► chalets, we have seen ongoing investment by ski resorts in a range of non-ski activities. This suits clients very well, especially families and groups of friends travelling together."

SNOWY ATTRACTIONS

Skiing is eternally popular, but with everything from city breaks to glacier adventures skiers and non-skiers are taking the opportunity to slope off and make the most of the season.

"Dining and wellness are key components of a successful ski holiday for many of our clients, as well as the ever-increasing array of off-the-slopes activities resorts are offering," explains Mclean.

Epicureans of all kinds are heading to the Dolomites, well-known for its excellent culinary scene, and Mclean highlights the Aman Rosa Alpina, which re-opens in Alta Badia this winter after a two-year renovation. Meanwhile she says, the Falkensteiner Hotel Kronplatz is a resort with exceptional spa facilities across 1,400m² and four floors, plus for those looking for more action, it even has a climbing wall.

There are similar offerings in Gastein, Austria, where clients can visit its thermal spas Alpentherme Bad Hofgastein or Felsentherme Bad Gastein, then round it off with a gourmet full moon dinner out in fresh mountain air at 1,950m, while Ishgl is another top spot for gourmets.

Described in Austrian Tourism's marketing as "a splash of happy right in your face", ice-bathing is the latest mindful winter travel option in Zillertal, Ötztal and Hintertux.

Nature's Ice Palace cave, in the Hintertux glacier, is also attracting sightseers and adventurers for stand-up paddle boarding and ice-swimming.

Further afield, Canadian resorts like Whistler, British Columbia, and Banff, Alberta, stand out for their abundant off-slope activities. There are plenty of unusual activities too – escape rooms, zip-lining and bob-sledding at Whistler Sliding Centre, and axe-throwing and ice canyon walks in Banff.

Canada is also seeing a trend towards twin- and multi-centre holidays, with skiers hitting the slopes for seven to nine nights for example in Whistler,



then adding on two- to three-night city breaks in Vancouver.

But this is not only a North American phenomenon. In Europe clients are using the slick Swiss Rail system to combine two or three resorts into one trip, or hitting Geneva or Paris while en-route to the likes of Saint-Gervais in France. Food is an attraction in this corner of France, and with top restaurants in Le Bettex easily accessible by gondola even non-skiers can enjoy the best of its mountain fare.

HOLIDAYS FOR THE GENERATIONS

Perhaps the beauty of this expansion in non-ski offerings is there's something

Pictured: (Clockwise from top) Downtime at the Thermes de Saint-Gervais Mont Blanc spa; Winter yoga (Gasteinertal Tourismus); Mountains in the Swiss Jungfrau region (Jungfrau Region Tourismus); Forest bathing in Austria (Carla Ravens); Relaxation in Alberta (Travel Alberta/Cakewalk Media)

for everyone, making for great multi-generational holidays.

Hazell says: "We have seen a huge increase in mixed generation groups, where perhaps grandparents enjoy a mountain holiday, while spending quality time with grandchildren and sharing in childcare."

"The togetherness provided by ski chalet holidays mean guests, often of mixed interest or ski ability, can enjoy a variety of pursuits on and off the slopes, then return 'home' to socialise and eat together."

Clients should consider towns instead of just resorts, says Didier Josephe, Director of Saint-Gervais Mont Blanc Tourism: "Saint-Gervais has shops, markets, some lovely churches and fascinating museums. Then there's the Mont-Blanc tramway taking non-skiers up the mountain for snow shoeing, ice climbing, paragliding, dog-sledding and ice-skating, plus Thermes de Saint-Gervais Mont Blanc, a 200-year-old spa focused on dermatological and respiratory treatments alongside the usual wellness."

With ski resorts taking a fresh look at providing plenty of variety for winter holidays, this means there are a growing number of "off-piste"





“Non-ski offerings mean there’s something for everyone, making for great multi-generational holidays”

experiences for clients and plenty of ways for agents to reinvent staple winter holidays.

BOOK IT

Ski Independence’s Classic Switzerland package includes seven nights in a classic room at the Braunbaer Hotel and Spa, costing from £2,388pp (half board). The price is based on two sharing and includes British Airways flights from London Heathrow to Zurich and first-class Swiss Rail transfers. Departs March 7, 2026. ski-i.com

Peak Retreats has a seven-night break at Les Sources de Canopée, three minutes from the gondola in St Gervais, staying in a two-bedroom self-catering apartment. It is priced from £244pp, based on five sharing. It includes return Eurotunnel LeShuttle crossing for one car with a free FlexiPlus upgrade. peakretreats.co.uk

Ski Beat has a week’s holiday for two sharing a twin or double en-suite room at Chalet Vallon Blanc in La Tania, priced from £784pp. The deal includes a chalet host, afternoon tea, three-course

evening meals with wine, transfers, plus return flights from London Gatwick or Manchester. skibeat.co.uk

Ski Independence also offers six night’s skiing at Banff Mt. Norquay, Banff Sunshine Village and Lake Louise Ski Resort, with three days to enjoy the other activities. Including 10 nights at Otter Hotel in a Superior Mountain View Room, it leads in at £2,403pp, based on two sharing, Air Canada flights from London Heathrow to Calgary and transfers. Depart by March 15, 2026. ski-i.com



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