The ultimate guide to summer holidays in the Alps

The hills are alive with holiday fever – here's why you should trade the Med for the mountains this summer

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Villages like Engelberg offer a cool alternative to the resorts of the Med in summer Credit: Engelberg-Titlis/Christian Perret

Is it all change in the Alps? Skiing has been the big draw across the range for much of the past century: Thomas Cook first offered ski packages in 1908, and most mountain resorts now depend on skiing for 75 per cent of their earnings. But with temperatures rising, snow less reliable and weather patterns becoming downright strange, winter tourism is a rapidly changing landscape.

To counter this, Alpine resorts are putting more effort into attracting summer travellers – more bike trails, running routes, cultural festivals, quirky family fun, astro-tourism and multifarious types of wellness. Especially as, with traditional beach spots increasingly exceeding boiling point, the cooler mountains can provide an escape from the heat.

The concept isn't new, of course. The first Alpine tourists, visiting in the 19th century, came in summer, for clean air and mountaineering. And it was over 90 years ago that Walter Ingham founded his namesake company – it started with ski holidays, but almost immediately expanded to offer summer walking trips too.Inghams recently carried out some research. "We looked at the stats and saw how walking is the most popular pleasure activity for people in the UK, and that it had increased after the pandemic," says Inghams' Elise Wortley. "We found that customers are mostly keen on spectacular views, a good range of accommodation options and food."

Spectacular views are a given in the Alps. But there are ever-more sophisticated ways of admiring them. For instance, you can ride audacious cable cars like the Schilthornbahn to Mürren, the world's steepest cableway (opened December 2024) or the Matterhorn Alpine Crossing. You can hop on a gondola to Chamonix's Mer de Glace, step into the magical Skyway Monte Bianco Infinity Room in Courmayeur or fly over the Mont Blanc Massif in planes with see-through canopies.

Accommodation options continue to develop, too. Take The Brecon, in the Swiss village of Adelboden, which aims to be "more dream home than luxury hotel". Or chic adults-only Odles Lodge, in Italy's South Tyrol, which puts the emphasis on style, freedom and privacy.

There's a growing trend for walkers wanting fancier places to stay – tour operator Original Travel has called it "bootiquing". Its luxe trip in the Dolomites combines spectacular hikes with five-star alpine hotels (five days half-board from £3,150pp, including flights).

Truth is, whether you're after mindfulness, massages and Michelin stars, or hut-to-hut hiking, mountain cheese and old-fashioned *Gemütlichkeit*, in essence the Alps haven't changed all that much. We might now be offered "forest bathing" excursions or guided wild swims. But it's the trees and tarns themselves, and the abundance of fresh air, space and splendour, that really makes this region the perfect summer spot.

Here are 10 glorious ways to enjoy it.

Kitzbühel, Austria

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Best for classic Alps

Self-proclaimed "home of sport and lifestyle", Kitzbühel is your classic summer Alpine resort, a jaw-dropping Tyrolean playground with an activity, adventure, outlet, excursion or eatery for everyone. There are over 1,000km of footpaths here, winding amid the forests, meadows and mountains.

There are also more than 800km of bike routes (including the innovative Sonnenrast and Streiteck MTB trails), four world-class golf courses, three bathing lakes, the Alpenblumengarten (home to 400-plus native plants), a wealth of wellness options and some top-class restaurants – like the Michelin-starred contemporary-French brasserie Les Deux. Expect events all summer, too, including Pura Vida (July 3-August 28, 2025), which sees Thursday evenings filled with yoga, music, food and drinks.

Kitzbühel in the Tyrolean mountains, has over 1,000km of footpaths Credit: Stefan Fuertbauer

Insider tip

Book a sunrise breakfast trip up the 1,996m Kitzbüheler Horn, which includes traditional brass music and a spread of farmhouse bread, fresh butter and local cheeses.

Nearest airport

Salzburg (1hr 15m), Innsbruck (1hr 20m), Munich (2hr).

How to do it

Inghams offers a week at Hotel Kaiserhof from £999pp including B&B accommodation and flights. Macs Adventure offers a six-night self-guided Kitzbühel Alpine Trail walk through the Kitzbüheler Alps, from £939pp including B&B accommodation, excluding flights.

Read our guide to Kitzbühel →

Vaujany, France

Best for families

Despite nudging the huge Alpe d'Huez ski area, little Vaujany has escaped with its mountain-village charm intact. Here, at 1,250m, old farmhouses jostle in a fine natural setting, by a waterfall, facing the Grandes Rousses Massif. But Vaujany also has plenty of mod-cons, including top-notch leisure facilities, making it fantastic for families. Indeed, it's a long-term holder of a "Family Plus" label, with child-friendly offerings ranging from kids clubs to free pram hire.

The best is Vaujany's Collet Centre. Accessible from the village by free petit train, it offers many free activities, from tennis and archery to frisbee golf and petanque; there's a pump track for skaters and bikers too. Kids can even learn to ride a husky sled and become a mini-musher for the day.

Vaujany in France has several leisure facilities, making it great for families Credit: Mixmike/E+

Insider tip

Pick up a Vaujany Discovery Card – free for anyone staying overnight, it covers certain activities and offers reduced rates on others.

Nearest airport

Grenoble (1hr), Lyon (2hrs).

How to do it

Summer France offers a week at central Hôtel les Cimes, close to Vaujany's restaurants, shops and cable cars, from £844 in a superior B&B quad (sleeping four), excluding flights.

Engelberg, Switzerland

Best for culture

Just 25km south of Lake Lucerne, Engelberg sits pretty in the peaks of central Switzerland, perched 1,000m up in the shadow of 3,239m Mount Titlis. It's easy to access by train, and even easier to get around, with a free bus connecting all the valley stations, plus 500km of hiking trails and the world's first rotating cableway up Titlis itself.

Engelberg sits among the peaks of Switzerland Credit: Sean Pavone / Alamy Stock Photo

Despite being the largest holiday resort in the region, with a distinctly sporty vibe, it's charming too, thanks to its *belle époque* buildings and Benedictine monastery, founded here in 1120 – explore it on a guided tour or join a cheese-making session in the monastery dairy. Or fully immerse yourself in cheese with a whey bath at the Gerschnialp dairy, at the foot of Titlis – whey is reputed to have healing properties, and will leave your skin creamy-soft.

Insider tip

Buy Titlis cable car tickets online to avoid queues. Use your Engelberg guest card (available to anyone staying overnight) to get 10 per cent off; holders of a Swiss Travel Pass save 50 per cent.

Nearest airport

Zurich (1hr).

How to do it

The five-star Eienwäldli campsite has pitches from around £22pn, doubles in its hotel from £175pn room-only.

Canazei, Italy

Best for natural wellness

Tucked in the Val di Fassa, flanked by the Dolomites mightiest, most magnificent massifs, Canazei is a natural playground.And it's easy to access, thanks to SkyAlps' thrice-weekly spring/summer Gatwick-Bolzano flights.

The Val di Fassa is flanked by the Dolomites mightiest, most magnificent massifs Credit: en.photo / Alamy Stock Photo

Also, from May to October, 35 lifts operate in the valley, whisking hikers up to meadows and mountains – walking options range from family strolls to hut-to-hut Trek-King routes right round the Fassa Dolomites. Road cyclists might be inspired to try Giro d'Italia climbs, or something less strenuous like the Fiemme & Fassa ride along the Avisio River.

Canazei is also a wonderful spot for wellness, including yoga, barefoot paths and forest bathing. Immerse yourself in the Japanese ritual baths at QC Terme Dolomiti or dip in Trentino's only sulphur spring at Terme Dolomia.

Insider tip

Try a chunk of Puzzone di Moena, a much-revered semi-hard local cheese that even gets its own annual festival (three days, mid-September).

Nearest airport

Bolzano (1hr), Venice (2hr 15m)

How to do it

Lupo Bianco Hotel has B&B doubles from around £385 for three nights. A four-day Dolomiti Trek-King Short Experience costs from £305pp (fassa.com), including half-board refuge accommodation.

Saalfelden Leogang, Austria

Best for biking

Lonely Planet named Saalfelden Leogang one of the 10 best travel regions in the world in 2024, on account of its strides towards sustainability and its glut of guided Alpine activities. This Salzburgerland resort is Austria's largest bike area, with over 90km of trails, and a network of lifts and cable cars to take you to them.

Austria's largest bike area has over 90km of trails Credit: Klemens König

Come to hit up Europe's biggest beginner's Bikepark, join a workshop to pick up riding tips and pedal up on the high plateau. Or plan a relaxed foodie e-bike tour – the region is great for gourmets too. A handful of its restaurants share 17 Gault&Millau toques (Austria's equivalent of Michelin stars); there are also farmers' markets and family *stube* serving creamy cheeses and spicy sausages.

Insider tip

Restore your limbs in the cool lakeside Krallerhof Atmosphere Spa, which has been designed to blend into the mountains.

Nearest airport

Salzburg (1hr), Innsbruck (1hr 45m), Munich (2hrs).

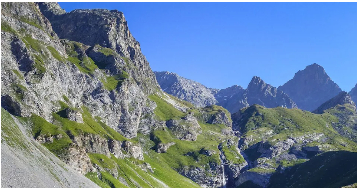
How to do it

Stay at a "Bike Friendly" hotel such as Puradies, which offers a three-night Bike In/Bike Out half-board package from £468pp.

Pralognan-la-Vanoise, France

Best for mountaineering

Pralognan-la-Vanoise, sitting below the highest peak in Vanoise National Park, is one of the original homes of mountaineering. Awarded the Terre d'Alpinisme label in 2022 – given to destinations that defend the Unesco-listed Intangible Cultural Heritage of mountaineering – Pralognan continues to draw those who love high places.



Pralognan-la-Vanoise attracts those who love high altitudes Credit: Alamy Stock Photo/Laurent Davoust

Although the local population is just 738, there are 35 hiking and mountain guides here. Possible excursions include an icy glacier trip, a hiking tour to the wildest peaks, and à la carte journeys, ranging from two to eight days, sleeping in mountain huts. Of course, you can hit the 250km of hiking trails alone; there are also chances to try climbing, paragliding, mountain-biking, trail running, via ferrata and more.

Insider tip

Visit for the Fête del l'Alpe et des Guides (one weekend, every August), a celebration of mountain guiding that includes talks, rope blessings and a parade.

Nearest airport

Chambéry (1hr).

How to do it

Alpine-style Hôtel les Airelles offers half-board from £72pp/pn. Perched at 2,000m, Refuge du Roc offers half-board dorms from £63pp/pn, doubles from £169pn.

Les Diablerets, Switzerland

Best for high-altitude adventures

Up in the Vaud Alps, the views are pretty special. The resort of Les Diablerets, at 1,200m, gazes right at a rocky massif. And, from Glacier 3000, a scenic cable car ride above the village, you can see the Matterhorn and Mont Blanc. Also at this height you'll find a taste of winter Alps: explore the glacier on foot, by Snowbus or sledge, and go tobogganing on the Alpine Coaster.

The view of the Glacier 3000 cable car Credit: Hans-Peter Huber/4cornersimages.com

Alternatively, test your nerve on the vertiginous Peak Walk, the world's first suspension footbridge between two summits. Settle your nerves afterwards at Glacier 3000's restaurant – designed by the renowned Swiss architect Mario Botta, it affords jaw-dropping mountain views.

Insider tip

Go on a Rando-Raclette – the tourist office rents raclette bags (containing stove and lighting kit, plus cheese, sausage, bread and beers), so you can picnic in the Swiss-est of ways.

Nearest airport

Geneva (2hrs).

How to do it

The Glacier Hotel has B&B doubles from £254pn. Ramble Worldwide has a seven-night guided Les Diablerets trip from around £2,000pp including half-board accommodation, leisurely walks and flights.

Schladming-Dachstein, Austria

Best for blue therapy

This Styrian eyrie, easily reachable by train from Salzburg, isn't well known by Brits. And yet it's a stunner: sheer limestone walls, green valleys and countless peaks. One of those peaks is the glaciated 2,700m Dachstein, which has a solar-powered mountain station, a panoramic restaurant and various vertiginous look-out platforms, including the "Stairway to Heaven".

Schladming-Dachstein is easy to reach by train from Salzburg Credit: Richard Schabetsberger

Schladming is also known as the Valley of the Thousand Springs, with 300 tarns and 100 waterfalls. You can follow various "water hikes", from the family-friendly Wild Waters path, via 140m-high Riesach Falls, to the route to Caribbean-blue Seekarlsee. Alternatively, there are rivers to raft, canyons to splash through and ponds to swim in – sites like Pürgg natural pool and Putterersee bathing lake are covered by the resort's free Summercard.

Insider tip

Head to Waldhäuslalm, former winner of 'Styrian Alpine Hut of the Year' in Gault&Milliau's Hutguide – catch a fish in the pond, then take it to the hut to be barbecued.

Nearest airport

Salzburg (1hr).

How to do it

Tui offers a week at Hotel Planai from £1,190pp including all-inclusive accommodation and flights. Nature and Wellness Hotel Höflehner has an extensive spa; four nights full-board from £632pp.

Santa Maria Maggiore, Italy

Best for art

The lush Valle Vigezzo, in Piedmont's Lepontine Alps, is also known as the Painters' Valley, on account of how many artists have worked and studied here over the centuries. The mountain village of Santa Maria Maggiore (at 840m) is home to the Rossetti Valentini Fine Arts School, founded in 1878 and still hosting courses alongside its impressive gallery.

The Rossetti Valentini Fine Art School in Santa Maria Maggiore Credit: AGF Srl / Alamy Stock Photo

The village itself, set amid woods and meadows, is also pretty as a picture, and has more museums: visit the Fragrance House, which celebrates local links to *eau de cologne*, and the Chimney Sweep Museum, which tells the story of Vigezzo's hardworking emigrants. Then explore the great outdoors – follow trails that lead into landscapes painted by local artists or hike the historic Via del Mercato, a 60km mule-track through the Vigezzo Valley, used by traders for centuries.

Insider tip

Travel through the valley via the Vigezzina Centovalli train line, which connects Domodossola and Locarno in breathtaking fashion. It's possible to buy one- or two-day hop-on, hop-off tickets.

Nearest airport

Milan Malpensa (1hr 20m).

How to do it

Small, family-run Hotel Miramonti offers a Long Weekend Classic break, including two nights half-board, from £177pp.

Tignes, France

Best for sport

Tignes bills itself as *the* sport and activity resort in the French Alps, with some justification. It was an official "Terre des Jeux 2024" – a Paris Olympics training camp for various disciplines – and it remains geared to outdoor exertions. You can do everything here, from cycling, hiking, trail running and rafting, to kayaking, biathlon, water sports and beach volleyball.