

SALLY CRANE, CAVAN IMAGES/ALAMY; RESIDENCE CAPELLA; MATTIA AQUILA

Get ready to hit the slopes

Our expert, *Sean Newsom*, kicks off this guide to the season ahead by revealing the best new holiday ideas



Once upon a time I used to struggle with winter. But then along came skiing and handed me a key. It opened an escape hatch – away from grey skies and welly-walks and away from the cabin fever that can settle over a whole city when night falls at 4pm. And suddenly I was careering down a mountain in a blaze of UV light, laughing at the thrill of it, the fun of it and the instant sense of adventure. Of course in those early days I crashed repeatedly. I was, after all, learning to snowboard. But I loved it even so. The buzz of my first trip lasted a full week once I was home.



So you'll have to excuse me if I start jabbering excitedly about what's to come. Yes, we're facing the uncertain prospect of a Super El Niño winter – widely predicted to bring a milder winter to the Alps with, possibly, the occasional freezing-cold interlude, more snow in the west of the US and less in Japan than usual. And yes, skiing grows ever more expensive and exclusive. Still, there's a lot to look forward to, not least a blizzard of new holidays, hotels and apartments to try. Here are 13 of the best that have cropped up on our radar as the first flurries approach.

A NEW CHALET-HOTEL IN ST MARTIN DE BELLEVILLE, FRANCE

Sociable, supportive chalet-hotels were once the mainstay of ski company portfolios in the Alps. Post-Brexit, not so much. So it's great to see Chalet-Hotel Claire opening in St Martin de Belleville in the Three Valleys. Run by the long-established tour operator Ski Miquel, it occupies the former Edelweiss hotel in the historic and tightly packed core of the resort. It's not just the chatty atmosphere, abundant food and reasonably priced drinks that make it appealing; jump on the nearby Village drag lift and instantly you're connected to the vast Three Valleys network of lifts and pistes.
Details Seven nights' chalet-board from £979pp, including flights (skimiquel.co.uk)

A NEW HOTEL IN VERBIER, SWITZERLAND

It may be an undisputed A-lister, but Verbier is also a resort chronically short of hotel beds. So the opening of the four-star Ski Lodge is big news, even if it only has 36 rooms. It comes just as the new Esserts-Savoleyres ski lift connects the easy-skiing pistes north of town with the tough stuff – both on-piste and off – that rises east of it. Mixed-ability couples will love the result; sweet-smelling wood-panelled bedrooms in the hotel and the chance to come together again for shared lunches on the slopes.
Details B&B doubles from £460 (theskilodge.com). Fly to Geneva

HEAD NORTH TO MYRKDALEN, NORWAY

This year Inghams has made its Norwegian ski holidays flexible – so you can ski when you like and for as long as you like. Which is good to know, given that the record-breaking El Niño may create a mild winter in the Alps. Up-and-coming Myrkdalen, which added two lifts in 2025, is a tempting prospect. Three hours by train northeast from Bergen, it has a reliably snowy microclimate and a small but feisty collection of pistes – with more available in nearby Voss. The smart Myrkdalen Hotel puts you right next to the lifts.
Details Five nights' B&B from £949pp, including flights (inghams.co.uk)

QUIET BUT THRILLING HEILIGENBLUT, AUSTRIA

With the main road to Heiligenblut closed by snow each winter, you need to wriggle in round on the back roads to ski its modest but spectacular area of intermediate-friendly slopes. Few bother, which leaves this underdeveloped village beneath Austria's highest mountain blissfully quiet. The views of the 3,798m Grossglockner are mind-blowing, the après-ski non-existent (in a good way) and anyone with the skills for ski-touring or off-piste skiing will be thrilled by its backcountry potential. This winter Iglu Ski is offering flights-inclusive packages to 14 of the resort's hotel and apartment-providers, including the four-star Landhotel Post, right next to the lift station.
Details Seven nights' half-board from £1,569pp, including flights (igluski.com)

HIGH-ALTITUDE AVORIAZ, FRANCE

When the snow is fresh and cold, the vast Portes du Soleil ski area is a buzz. But the slopes aren't exactly skyscraping – and you need to build as much altitude as possible into your plans to cope with the occasional thaws. Purpose-built Avoriaz at 1,800m is the base to aim for – and this year it has newly refurbished apartments courtesy of the ski-in, ski-out Résidence Capella. This season, along with the area's broad, confidence-boosting slopes, you can also enjoy skiing alongside a white-tailed eagle – bird of prey displays will take place up the mountain outside the Pointe de Nyon café (from £21pp; en.morzine-avoriaz.com).
Details Seven nights' self-catering from £668pp, including flights (pierreetvacances.com)

OLYMPIC STAR CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, ITALY

No wonder Cortina d'Ampezzo was the star of the Winter Olympics in February. Not only is it cute and compact, the scenery is breathtaking too – and now that the circus has left town you can check into one of its new five-star hotels and ski it in style. The Grand Hotel Ampezzo will do nicely. A top-to-bottom refit has left its rooms pale and palatial, while its sizeable spa is the perfect place to soothe your nerves after a white-knuckle day on the slopes. Because – as the downhill racer Mikaela Shiffrin and co will attest – its best pistes are mind-bogglingly steep.
Details B&B doubles from £600 (grandhotelampezzo.it). Fly or take the train to Venice

THREE VALLEYS BARGAIN LES MENUIRES, FRANCE

Here's further proof that the Three Valleys resort of Les Menuires is going quietly but steadily upmarket. This season it's got a new Fahrenheit Seven hotel. With flashes of kooky 1970s style, it's bringing the same sense of fun to its piste-side location as you'll find in its Val Thorens sibling; and while room prices are not excessive, its Veuve Clicquot sun terrace is clearly going to be a bit of a catwalk. But never mind the purring:

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From top: a skier in Myrkdalen, Norway; Méribel, in the Three Valleys ski area in France; Résidence Capella in Avoriaz, France; the spa at Grand Hotel Ampezzo in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy

Travel Ski special

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it's the skiing that counts, and with 600km of pistes on the doorstep your whole week is going to feel privileged.
Details Seven nights' B&B from £1,204pp, including flights (crystalski.co.uk)

BUILD CONFIDENCE IN VAL D'ISÈRE, FRANCE

If you've lost that loving feeling on the slopes, and spend your holidays worrying about a wipeout, VIP's new Ski Confidence Week can help. Launching in Val d'Isère on April 11, it stars the mindset coach Kate Casali, who offers a 30-minute pre-trip discussion with each client before mixing traditional ski instruction with individual analysis once you hit the mountains. And if the very words "Val d'Isère" give you the willies, fear not. This famously steep resort is also home to two gentle plateaux – easily accessed from your digs in the cute No 6 Bellevarde Chalet.
Details Seven nights' half-board from £1,268pp (vip-chalets.com). Fly to Geneva



No 6 Bellevarde Chalet in Val d'Isère, France; above right, on the slopes in Alpe d'Huez, France

LESSONS IN THE DOLOMITES AT CAMPITELLO, ITALY

Many of Ski Freshtracks' group holidays are aimed at skiers who want to master the tricky art of powder skiing. But this new Sella Ronda On Piste Instruction week follows a smoother path – skiing the broad and beautifully groomed pistes of the Italian Dolomites. Based in the friendly Hotel Salvan in Campitello, it's aimed at mid-level skiers and mixes three days of instruction with three days of social skiing. In such a benign and inspiring setting you'll soon be up on your edges and carving sharp lines.
Details Seven nights' half-board from £1,750pp, including flights (skiclub.co.uk)

OFF-PISTE IN NISEKO, JAPAN

Nothing is certain when it comes to the weather, but El Niño will probably affect Japanese snowfall this winter, with poorer conditions expected, especially on the main island of Honshu. Hokkaido, the island to the north, is regarded as a slightly safer bet; so anyone hunting the country's fabled powder this season might like to consider Ski Freshtracks' new Niseko Discovery group tour from January 14-25. Aimed primarily at advanced but not expert skiers, it checks into the new, slope-side Moxy Niseko Village hotel and offers seven days of sociable skiing and two more of off-piste tuition.
Details Ten nights' B&B from £2,850pp (skiclub.co.uk). Fly to Sapporo

> "The villages beyond St Moritz are having a bit of a renaissance"



LAURENT SALINO/ALPE D'HUEZ TOURISME; CHRISTOPHE HASSEL

GOOD VALUE APARTMENTS IN ALPE D'HUEZ, FRANCE

The all-new La Perle d'Alba apartments in Alpe d'Huez are in a canny spot. Not only are there nursery slopes on the doorstep and a branch of the ESF ski school, but one of the lifts nearby unlocks the long, easy-skiing pistes immediately above the resort, while another whisks you to the underused slopes to the south. In other words, it's a great launchpad for a family of keen intermediates who want to stretch their legs, with interiors that are a cut above the norm.
Details Seven nights' self-catering from £592pp, including Eurotunnel LeShuttle crossing (peakrestreats.co.uk)

ZUOZ AND THE ENGADIN VILLAGES, SWITZERLAND

The villages beyond St Moritz are having a bit of a renaissance. Last winter saw the reopening of the arty Chesa Marchetta in Sils Maria. Now, in Zuoz, the Concordia hotel is about to relaunch, with spacious rooms and an airy, country house ambience that harks back to its original 1876 opening. There will be damask wallpapers, heavy tie-back curtains and parquet floors, but it's so old-fashioned it actually feels fun and fresh – with Zuoz's local slopes your first taste of the Engadin valley's scattered but high-quality pistes. Corvatsch, Corviglia and Diavolezza are the main areas, served by local trains and buses.
Details B&B doubles from £364 (hotelconcordia). Fly to Zurich

DEER VALLEY IN UTAH, USA

Last winter many Utah resorts had roughly half their average dose of the white stuff – thanks to one of the stingiest snow droughts ever to settle over the Wasatch Mountains. This winter should be better; allowing us all to catch up with Deer Valley's recent growth spurt. The unashamedly posh area has recently doubled in size, adding nearly a hundred waymarked trails to its existing terrain. Some things haven't changed, though. A ban on all snowboarders and a cap on daily visitor numbers keeps the slopes quiet. Ski Independence has a package, staying in fitting style at the luxurious St Regis hotel.
Details Seven nights' room only from £4,549pp, including flights (ski-i.com)