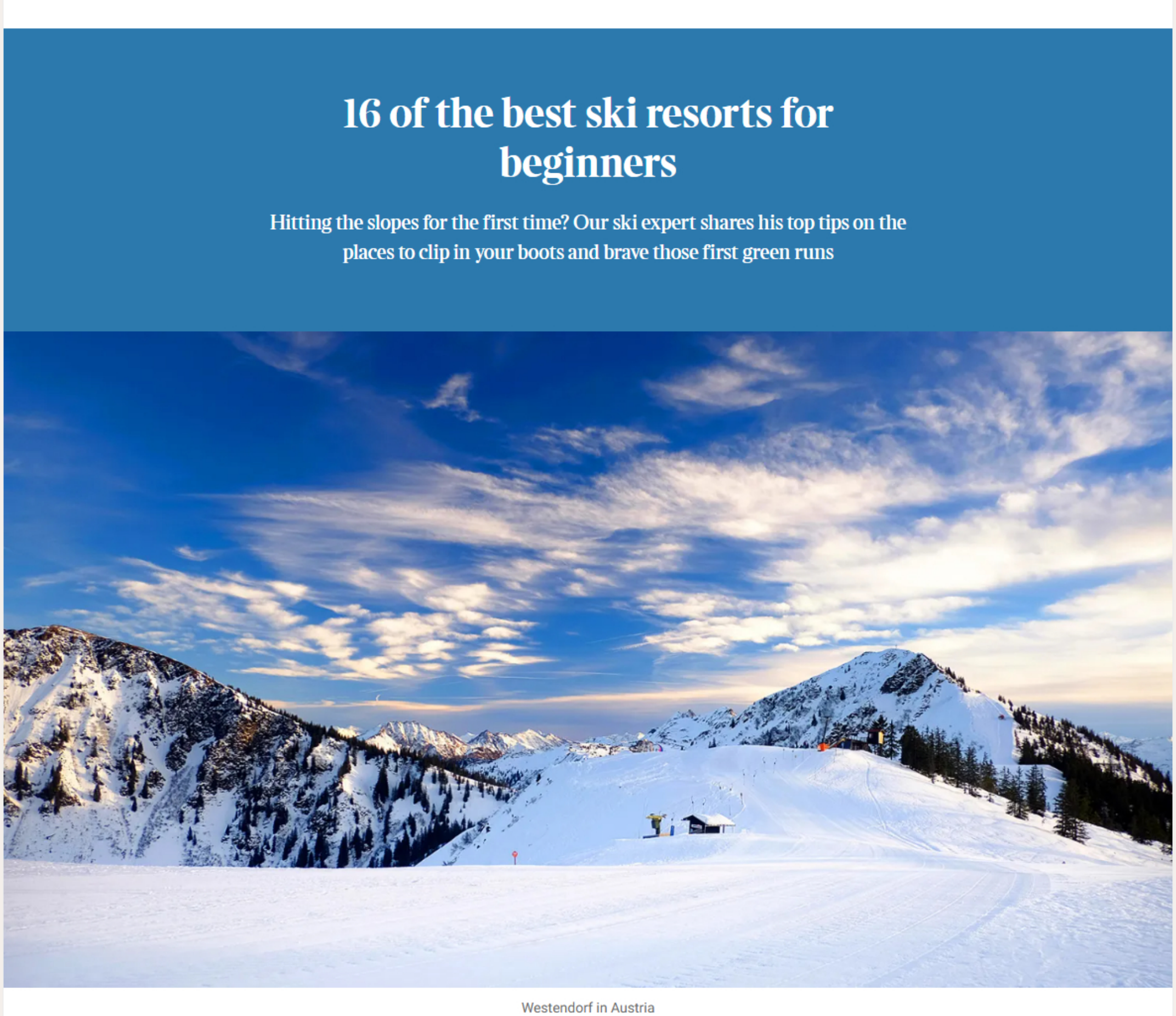
16 of the best ski resorts for beginners

Hitting the slopes for the first time? Our ski expert shares his top tips on the places to clip in your boots and brave those first green runs



Westendorf in Austria

ALAMY

Mike MacEacheran, Peter Hardy | Tuesday February 04 2025, 5.00pm, The Times

Here is some good, myth-busting news: learning to ski doesn't take three weeks. In fact, anyone who is moderately fit and coordinated can graduate from beginner slopes in a day and be tackling easier intermediate pistes in their first week.

Now for tips to smooth things along. If possible, aim to avoid the school holidays — neither overcrowded slopes nor oversized classes are conducive to learning. Try to up your exercise level before travelling, and to take a couple of lessons on a dry ski slope or — better still — on artificial snow at a UK centre. Learning in advance how to put on your boots and skis/board, make your first turns and fall over safely will save time and expense. Lastly, borrow clothing and kit from friends where possible, but be sure to hire boots and skis/boards in your chosen resort — so you can change them if they're uncomfortable. These are the best ski resorts for beginners.

Become a subscriber and, along with unlimited digital access to The Times and The Sunday Times, you can enjoy a collection of travel offers and competitions curated by our trusted travel partners, especially for Times+ members

This article contains affiliate links, which may earn us revenue

1. Laax, Switzerland

ALAMY

Best for snowboarders

ADVERTISEMENT

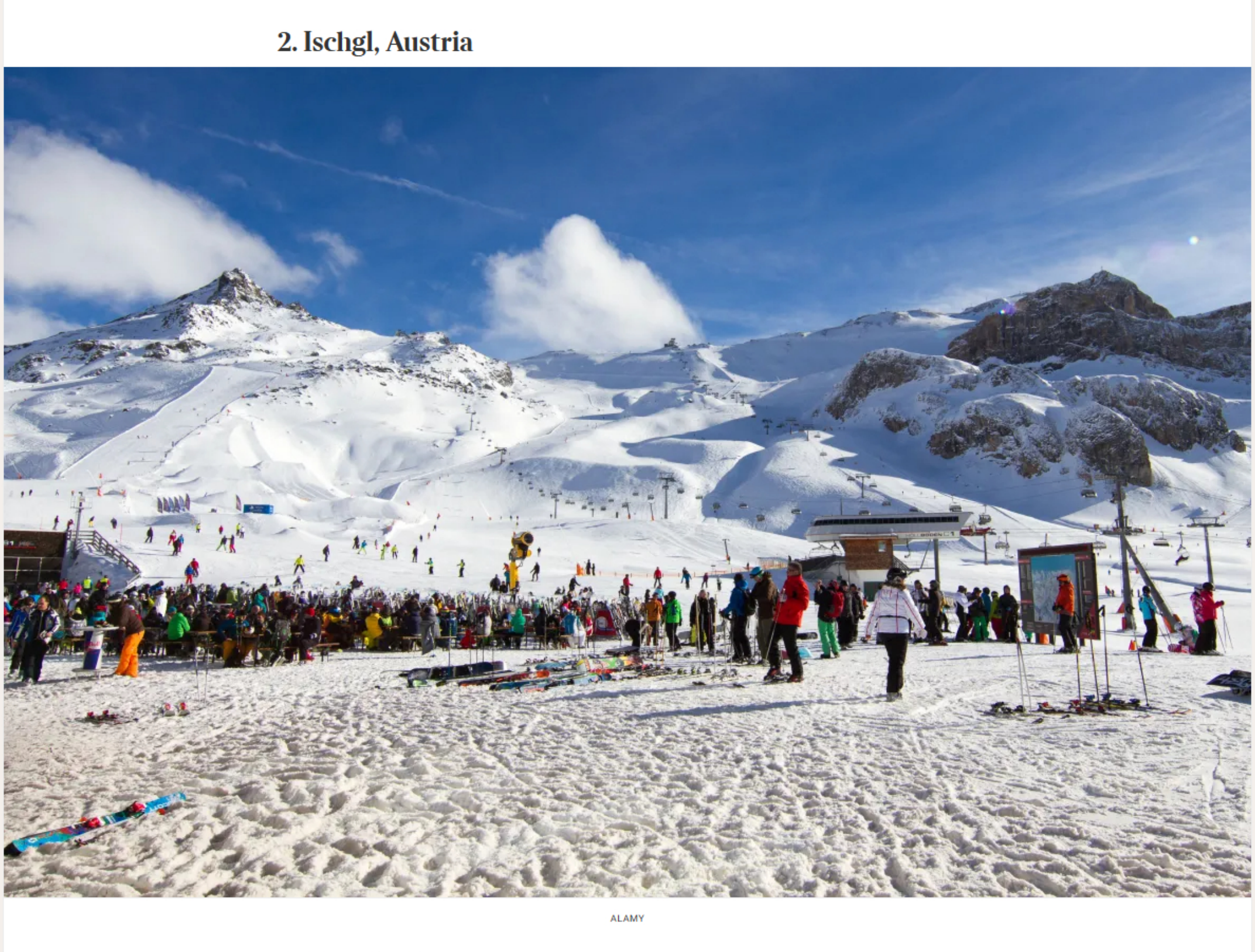
While the skiers in your friendship group are arguing about which is the best resort to pick for views and brews, the snowboarders are heading to one place: Laax in Graubünden, the undeniable boarding capital of the Alps. Newbies will find well-versed, English-speaking instructors and once you find your legs, you'll want to spend your time below the main mountain complex atop Crap Sogn Gion, or stick to the treeline and follow Curnius, a gentle blue that tumbles to neighbouring resort Falera.

To aid your improvement off the slopes, Europe's first Freestyle Academy is open again and provides trampolines, jumping towers and airbags — all necessary if you'd rather spend time prepping for the snow park than the piste. This might be swanky, spendy Switzerland, but entrance starts at only CHF30 (around £26) for adults and lower for under-18s — and you can get discounts of up to 40 per cent if you buy your ticket using the Laax app. One last thing: the Laax Open runs for one week every January, drawing the best freestyle boarders in the biz to the resort. Come at any other time to take advantage of cheaper accommodation prices.

Book a stay

- Best ski resorts in Switzerland

2. Ischgl, Austria



ALAMY

Best for older skiers

Pretty-as-pie Ischgl, with its reputation for partying fortysomethings, is changing. The introduction of a swish new spa and a post-pandemic pivot towards luxury hotels, wine bars and tasting menus have made it the connoisseur's choice for a snowsure Tyrol escape — the lifts are spinning from late November until early May. Besides that, the on-mountain infrastructure is the most efficient in all of Austria and the idea of queuing to ride any lift seems crazy.

ADVERTISEMENT

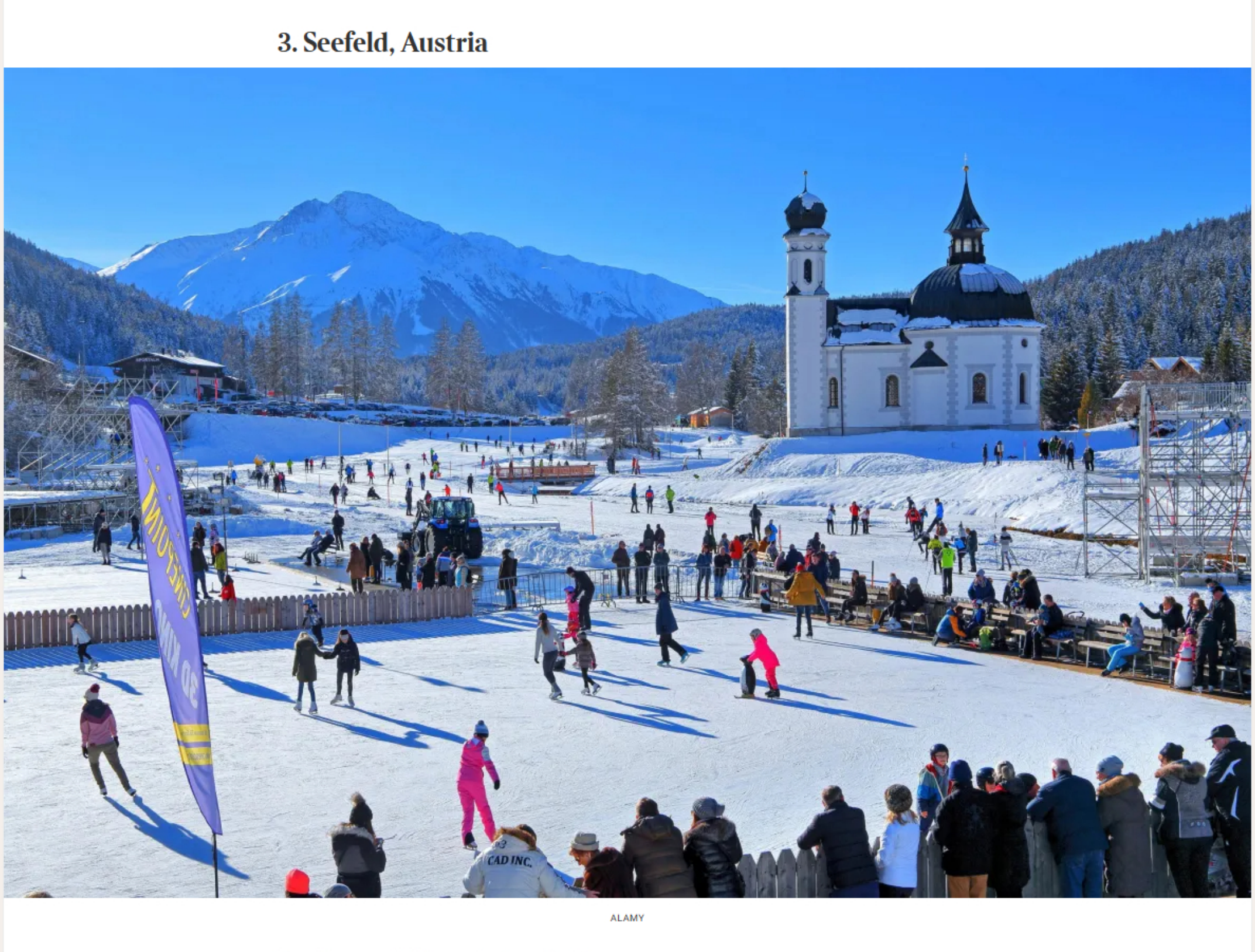
For beginners, all of these lead to Idalp, a monstrous bowl of groomers that's crisscrossed by chairs, magic carpets and wonderfully gentle slopes for those on their first few turns. In soft snow, it's almost possible to snowplough back to the top lift stations without any effort. Another part of the piste worth discovering is the easy-on-the-thighs schuss from the top of the Höllkarbahn six-person chair.

If that all sounds too perfect, then the downside is the chaotic rally down the red-only runs back to the village after the lifts close. Those on their first ski holiday should grab a frothy stein instead at Pardorama restaurant before riding the bubble back down like a boss.

Book a stay

- Best ski resorts in Austria

3. Seefeld, Austria



ALAMY

Best for a multi-faceted winter holiday

If you want a taste of snow that goes beyond downhill skiing, Seefeld is ready and waiting. Perched on a forested plateau, half an hour by train from Innsbruck, it's essentially a cross-country skiing hub with all kinds of other wintry bells and whistles attached. Just outside the centre of town, for example, its collection of ice rinks — overlooked by an onion-domed chapel — is a serene and lovely setting for a skating lesson or a fiercely competitive Bavarian curling match. Nearby, you can combine cross-country skiing with target shooting by taking a biathlon lesson. And if you're feeling less energetic, almost every hotel seems to have its own spa.

ADVERTISEMENT

Meanwhile, because downhill skiing is a secondary pursuit, the slopes are often blissfully quiet. Most beginners get going on the Geigenbühel or Birkenlift nursery pistes, right next to town, before progressing to the Gschwandtkopf area of easy early-intermediate runs nearby. Bear in mind, however, that none are particularly high, so plan to ski them in the sweet spot of late January and early February. If the weather's right, you won't find a more charming introduction to the season.

Book a stay

- **Read our full guide to** ski holidays

4. Mayrhofen, Austria

MAYRHOFNER BERGBAHNEN

Best for deckchairs and an igloo

The bustling valley town of Mayrhofen provides two mountains for skiing. The biggest by far is the Penken, and it's here that most beginners take their first lessons, in a separate, tranquil area of nursery slopes at the top of the access lift. Mayrhofen has long been a popular destination for British skiers (most of whom come on flights-included package holidays), so instructors are very comfortable teaching in English. Beginners should make quick progress and once they do, they'll want to get over to the other mountain, the Ahorn. This flat plateau has one steep-valley run, and most accomplished skiers shun its limited slopes.

Improving beginners, by contrast, will love it. It's not just because the easy pistes on the plateau are wide, uncrowded and the ideal place to build your confidence once you've mastered your snowplough turns. WhiteLounge is just as big a draw. A sprawling complex of igloos, it's fronted by a buzzing bar and parades of deckchairs. Sprawling here in the sunshine, drink in hand, with a 360-degree panorama of mountains to gawp at, is one of skiing's great piste-side experiences. Especially as you don't have to worry about skiing that plunging valley run. You just climb back on the Ahornbahn cable car for a quick ride back to base.

Book a stay

ADVERTISEMENT

5. Alpe d'Huez, France

GETTY IMAGES

Best for nightlife

Alpe d'Huez is where you go when the siren call of skiing's nightlife is as strong as its pistes. This huge resort corrals most of its accommodation into a single urban centre, which keeps the après-ski buzz focused; a plentiful supply of inexpensive self-catering apartments makes it popular with twentysomethings. Add the success of Tomorrowland Winter's dance-music shindig, staged in the resort every March, and it's not hard to see why it's become party central, even when the festival's not in town. The fun usually starts at the Folie Douce, up on the pistes at the top of the Marmottes lift, before descending to the likes of the Zoo Bar and Smithy's Tavern as the lifts close.

The resort's beginner slopes are equally impressive. They unfurl across a great *cirque* of gentle snow at the town's northern tip, creating a first-timer's playground that's unrivalled in the Alps. Book into one of Ski France's chalets at this end of town and you'll enjoy ski-in, ski-out access. What's more, there are several ego-boosting pistes to progress to, just a little further uphill — although the chances are you won't be riding the lifts right to the top of the ski area just yet; several of the pistes are incredibly steep.

Book a stay

- Best ski resorts in France

ADVERTISEMENT

6. Val Cenis, France

ALBAN PERNET

Best for long descents and low prices

Let's hear it for the reasonable prices of the ski school in Val Cenis in the Haute Maurienne valley. Here a course of six group lessons with the ESF (École du Ski Français) costs €148 (£123). Each of the lessons may only be two and a half hours long, but they're cheaper than tuition in many other resorts. Book a self-drive, self-catering trip with the likes of Peak Retreats and your basic holiday costs will be reasonable too. (You can then use your car to day-trip up to Bessans, nearby, for a spot of cross-country skiing, too.)

What you won't be doing, however, is checking into some kind of desperate, one-lift backwater. Val Cenis's ski area is a feisty, varied spot with magnificent views across the valley and some charming (and affordable) restaurants both on and off the slopes. What's more, it's home to what's probably the longest beginner-rated slope in the Alps. L'Escargot, aka the Snail, follows the course of the mountain road that leads towards the Italian border. First-timers won't be able to ski it immediately, but they certainly will by the end of the week — zig-zagging six miles through the snow that coats the north-facing forest and feeling mighty proud of themselves.

Book a stay

- **Discover our full guide to** France

7. Les Gets, France

ALAMY

Best for all ages

Les Gets is a family-friendly resort for beginners as well as for more accomplished skiers looking for endless intermediate terrain. It's a good-looker: a classic Savoyard farming village with modern chalets that all blend nicely into the bucolic setting. Chalets 1066 has a wide choice of more than 50 chalets and apartments.

Almost perfect? The village is at a low 1,172m (3,845ft), although stone-free grass pastures underfoot need only a few inches of snow to cover easy slopes and become operational. I'd be hesitant about booking during the Christmas and Easter periods, but anywhere in between should work. The best time to be here is from mid-January until mid-March.

The skiing in the interlinked Portes du Soleil resorts, of which this is one in a dozen in France and Switzerland, goes up to nearly 2,500m (8,200ft) and covers a mighty 230 miles of pistes.

In short: this is a great village, with lovely blue-rated intermediate runs, a wide range of accommodation and excellent British ski schools such as Les Gets Ski School and British Alpine Ski & Snowboard School.

Book a stay

8. Val d'Isère, France

ALAMY

Best for easy snowsure slopes

Why choose such a mainstream — and therefore expensive — resort as Val d'Isère for beginners? Well, it has some of the best ski schools in France and, these days, some of the best easy slopes at a snowsure altitude. The latter are the result of the Herculean reshaping of the summit of Solaise in 2016, and sit at the heady height of 2,500m (8,200ft). In this mid-mountain base area you can also warm up in Le Lounge between nursery runs before progressing to a series of blue runs nearby that mark the next stage of your ski or snowboard development journey.

Importantly, you can easily meet up with more accomplished friends here for lunch, and the choice of ski schools is exceptional. In particular I'd recommend Scottish-run Progression Ski and the local Oxygene. Val d'Isère is snow-safe from late November until early May. Away from the slopes, visit the Centre Aquasportif where leisure facilities include swimming pools and a squash court.

Book a stay

9. Westendorf, Austria

ALAMY

Best for ski schools

The ski schools here in chocolate-box Tyrol claim to have taught more Brits to ski than any other resort in the world. That may well be true — it's certainly an outstanding learning centre combined with a huge choice of green and blue runs, glorious scenery and a welcoming ambience. The combination will make you wonder why you have never been skiing before.

Westendorf used to be isolated, one of the resorts not properly connected into the giant SkiWelt ski area. These days it is an important linking point between Skiwelt's 81 lifts and Kitzbühel's 58. Nevertheless, Westendorf manages to maintain its laid-back village appeal. Its four ski schools provide healthy competition, the standard of instruction is high, and there's an abundance of thigh-slapping *gemütlichkeit*, as you'd hope for in a classic Tyrolean community such as this. As is the case with Les Gets, however, the resort's lowish altitude means it's best skied between mid-January and mid-March. Four-star Landhotel Schermer is close to the lifts and has a spacious swimming pool and spa area.

Book a stay

10. Jasna, Slovakia

GETTY IMAGES

Best for budget breaks

This is a notable exception to my general premise that you shouldn't go to Eastern Europe for your first ski holiday. This resort in the Low Tatras offers some supreme skiing with 30 miles of well-groomed pistes and a modern 20-lift system.

Low prices, well-equipped rental shops, a choice of ski schools, easy green and blue runs and plenty of mountain ambience make this an ideal destination for beginners. Importantly, it also has more demanding pistes and challenging off-piste to keep all standards happy. Prices are generally around 40 per cent less than in French or Austrian resorts. The nearest airport is Poprad-Tatry, a 45-minute drive away, with regular Wizz Air flights from Luton.

At the moment, Jasna remains more of a ski area than a destination. Each year sees more chalets and hotel rooms being constructed at the base area, but the main accommodation is a ten-minute ride away downhill at Demanovska Dolina. If travelling with children in particular, don't miss out on the giant Tatralandia waterpark with its huge swimming pools. Jasna Adventures offers a full range of ski holidays here.

Book a stay

- **Best affordable ski resorts in Europe**

11. Baqueira-Beret, Spain

ORIOL CLAVERA/ALAMY

Best for the royal seal of approval

This high resort in the Pyrenees with a substantial 74 miles of pistes is a favourite with the Spanish royal family and for over 40 years it has attracted a high-flying clientele from Madrid and Barcelona. It sits in isolated splendour above the attractive market town of Vielha in the scenic Val d'Aran, a two-hour drive from Toulouse airport, and has lots of easy slopes for beginners.

The resort itself is no beauty, although the hotels soften the original 1970s architecture. Much of the area's charm lies in the ancient villages that line the road up from Vielha. A car is not essential, but is useful for exploring the restaurants and bars tucked away down cobbled streets in the quaint hamlets below the resort itself.

The big attraction here is the British BB Ski School. There are also local alternatives with some English-speaking instructors, but learning to ski or snowboard with a native-speaking instructor is a definite advantage.

Book a stay

- **The best of Spain**

12. Vaujany, France

ALAMY

Best for convenience

This farming village on the edge of — but fully linked into — the giant Alpe d'Huez ski area has expanded considerably in recent years. Goats, rabbits and cows in their steamy winter barns no longer outnumber visitors, but Vaujany still exudes rural charm and a sense of tranquillity that so many developed resorts fail to provide.

Convenience is a key factor here. A giant cable car whisks you up into the main ski area, while a gondola from the same village station takes learners up into Vaujany's own secluded Montfrais area with dedicated nursery slopes, green runs, and lots of scope for intermediates. When you tire of your exertions, piste-side mountain restaurants offer welcome respite with lazy lunches at non-exorbitant prices on sunny terraces.

The ESF here has English-speaking instructors and plenty of experience at teaching British skiers of all ages. They offer morning or all-day lessons and supervised lunches for children. I particularly recommend the village crèche. Surrey-based Ski Peak has been providing ski holidays here since the 1980s.

Book a stay

13. Soldeu/El Tarter, Andorra

ALAMY

Best for no-frills fun

Along with Pas de la Casa, these two adjoining villages share the 130 miles of pistes in Grandvalira, the largest ski area in the principality. Soldeu is an old village with convenient access to the slopes, some traditional hotels, a good choice of restaurants and a smattering of shops. Neighbouring El Tarter has modern hotels and its own gondola provides ski access. I'd describe the atmosphere in both as unpretentious, less beer-orientated than Pas de la Casa, and suitable for all age groups.

Low prices remain an attraction in duty-free Andorra, but they're by no means as low as they used to be. The Soldeu/El Tarter ski school has a formidable reputation for teaching beginners and a good percentage of instructors are British; there are offices at the top of both the Soldeu and El Tarter gondolas. Ski Andorra Holidays has a wide choice of holidays here, along with Neilson.

Book a stay

- **The most luxurious ski resorts in the world**

14. Cervinia, Italy

GETTY IMAGES

Best for a range of slopes

The ski area is linked to Zermatt's, but as a beginner skier or snowboarder you won't be crossing the Swiss frontier. You'll be focusing instead on the extensive nursery slopes and easy blue runs in Italy. The challenge, by the end of your first week, is to conquer the Ventina, a seven-mile slope that winds from Plateau Rosa all the way down to the village through a thigh-sapping 1,833 vertical metres. If you achieve it, the satisfaction is so great that you'll be hooked on ski holidays for life.

The beginner slopes are close to the main hotels and are both sheltered and gentle. All three ski schools are good, with plenty of English-speaking instructors. It's also worth noting that the cost of a private ski lesson is about half that of one in France.

The architecture varies from imperial 1930s through imposing concrete blocks of the 1960s to a contemporary style more in keeping with its mountain surroundings. But don't look down, look up at the majesty of Il Cervino, better known on its Swiss side as the Matterhorn. Inghams and Crystal are the main ski holiday providers here.

Book a stay

- **Best ski resorts in Italy**
- **Read our full guide to Italy**

15. Obergurgl, Austria

ALAMY

Best for reliable snow

This village at the end of the Otztal, close to the Italian frontier, has been a favoured destination for British families learning to ski since the 1960s. The big plus point here is its village altitude of 1,950m (6,400ft), with the top lift at a mighty 3,080m (10,105ft). This means you can expect reliable snow cover at village level throughout the long season — which is important for beginners as they'll be making their first turns at this level.

The standard of teaching in the ski schools is high and all instructors are English speakers. Ski lessons are easygoing and good value, and are run both morning and afternoon — in contrast to many French ski schools (which offer morning-only group lessons). Just be sure your children are happy to ski after lunch before you commit, or check your accommodation offers childcare. Hotel Edelweiss & Gurgl is one of several Obergurgl hotels that can oblige. It has a spa and indoor and outdoor pools, and is conveniently located for both the slopes and après-ski.

Book a stay

16. Big White, British Columbia, Canada

ALAMY

Best for family-run resorts

This is Canada's largest ski-in, ski-out resort, where you click into your bindings from the door of your accommodation and Main Street is a ski run. It's a small, attractive and family-friendly village located in the Okanagan Highland, 35 miles from Kelowna airport which is reached by a 50-minute flight from Vancouver.

It's ideally suited to beginner snowboarders, with friendly instruction on offer and only one tricky t-bar among its 16 ski lifts. With the top lift going up to

2,319m (7,608ft), snow cover is reliable for much of the season, helped by the local microclimate. Here, moisture-filled clouds freeze on contact with the resort's forests, and build up thick layers of icy, wind-sculpted rime. The result is a mountainside coated in tortuous white shapes known as snow ghosts — and they're a weird and wonderful backdrop to the pistes.

Beginners here reach their first turns via a magic carpet lift before progressing to easy slopes served by a modern quad chair. Families are well catered for — Ski Canada magazine described Tot Town Daycare as "the best place to be abandoned by your parents". SNO offers a wide range of ski holidays here.

Book a stay

- Best ski resorts in Europe
- Best self-catered ski chalets

Additional reporting by Richard Mellor

Sign up to the travel newsletter for weekly inspiration, advice and deals here

Our bestselling holidays

These offers are brought to you by TIMES Travel

AVAILABLE FROM: SEPTEMBER 24TH 2025

All-Inclusive Luxury Mekong River Cruise with Vietnam & Cambodia Tour

16 days from

£2999 pp

Explore

AVAILABLE FROM: JANUARY 5TH 2026

Barbados Retreat & All-Inclusive Azamara Eastern Caribbean Voyage

16 days from

£3499 pp

Explore

AVAILABLE FROM: NOVEMBER 28TH 2025

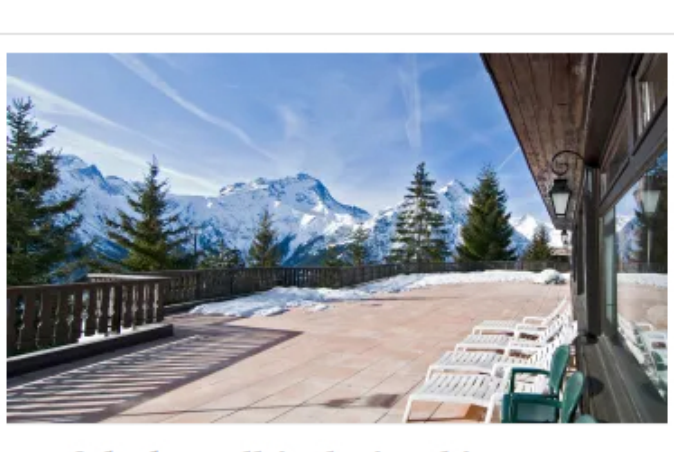
Luxury All-Inclusive South America & Chilean Fjords Voyage with Iguazu Falls Discovery

25 days from

£4699 pp

Explore

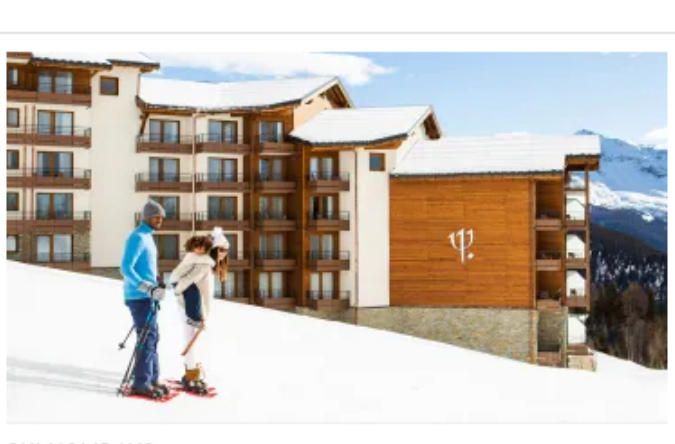
Related articles



10 of the best all-inclusive ski resort hotels

November 07 2024, 2.18pm

Sean Newsom



SKI HOLIDAYS

18 of the best family ski resorts in Europe

September 05 2024, 4.30pm

Sean Newsom

SPORT HOLIDAYS

16 of the best luxury ski chalets in Europe

December 23 2022, 1.00pm

Sean Newsom

PROMOTED CONTENT

BACK TO TOP

THE TIMES
THE SUNDAY TIMES

Get in touch

About us
Contact us
Help
The Times Editorial Complaints
The Sunday Times Editorial Complaints
Place an announcement
Classified advertising
Display advertising
The Times corrections
The Sunday Times corrections
Careers

More from The Times and The Sunday Times

The Times e-paper
The Sunday Times e-paper
The Sunday Times Wine Club
Times Print Gallery
The Times Archive
Times Crossword Club
Sunday Times Driving
Times+
The Sunday Times Rich List
Travel
Good University Guide
Schools Guide
Newsletters
Best Places to Live
Best Places to Stay
Times Appointments
Podcasts
Times Money Mentor
Times Luxury
Sportswomen of the Year Awards
Best Places to Work
Puzzles
TV guide
Times Radio
The Sunday Times 100
Times Bookshop

More from News Corp

The Australian
Barron's
Dow Jones
Financial News London
Investor's Business Daily
Mansion Global
MarketWatch
Realtor.com
The Sun
Times Literary Supplement
The Wall Street Journal

© Times Media Limited 2025.
Registered in England No. 894646. Registered office: 1 London Bridge Street, SE1 9GF.