



The 10 greatest ski resorts in France

The top places to ski this winter, in a country that offers the biggest variety of resorts in the world

The French claim the best cuisine, the best wines and the best variety of ski resorts of any country in the world. While the first two are open to question these days, the third is undoubtedly true. Destinations range from the high-altitude and purpose-built like Val Thorens with the seemingly endless terrain of the 600km Trois Vallées ski area on its doorstep, to lesser-known farming villages with traditional French ambience and tree-lined slopes like Les Carroz. British visitors may find that their expensively-purchased Euros go further in bars and restaurants in Austria and Italy, and indeed in Eastern Europe, in these financially-challenging times. But staying in lesser-known French destinations, or lower satellite villages that link to big-name areas (Les Carroz links into the Grand Massif area, shared with better known Flaine), are attractive ways to reduce costs. Nevertheless, going uphill is becoming more expensive: lift pass prices across France rocketed last year and there are still further increases for 2024/25. It pays to check out the growing variety of different tickets on offer, such as localised, family or group passes. Val Cenis was the first resort to introduce a 'weatherproof' pass – if snow or rain falls for more than three hours, you get your money back for that day, even if you've skied. Chalet packages with UK tour operators continue to offer some of the best value in French resorts, although tour operators have made changes to the traditional model in recent years. Many companies have reduced the number of chalets they offer or scrapped them all together. Self-catering has also become a more enticing proposition, staying in increasingly upmarket newly-built apartment residences with swimming pool and spa areas. Big reductions in the number of package holidays mean that booking well in advance has become more essential than ever, particularly if planning half-term or Easter breaks in France's most popular resorts. Climate change continues to seriously impact ski holidays in France in particular. Big, high-altitude ski areas such as the Trois Vallées and Val d'Isère-Tignes have traditionally always had a marked price difference between low and high season dates. Holiday prices in January and March reflected the reduced volume of visitors, while February attracted more skiers at peak prices. But that's no longer happening. Lack of snow or rather, a public perception of shortage in lower resorts throughout the winter, means that holidaymakers are setting their sights higher, heading instead for snow-safe destinations above 1,800m. The consequences are more crowded slopes throughout the season at higher altitude destinations and higher prices generally throughout the season. Here's our pick of where to go skiing in France. Courchevel Best for beginners Courchevel, famous for its glitz and multi-million-euro property prices, might at first glance seem an unusual choice for novices, but the resort has many facets. Situated at one end of the giant Trois Vallées ski area that includes Méribel and Val Thorens, 1850 is the smartest, most expensive and highest of the six Courchevel villages. In less fashionable Moriond (also known as 1650), Village (1550), Le Praz (1300) and nearby La Tania and Saint Bon much cheaper accommodation is found. Moriond is ideal for beginners, with gentle nursery slopes well away from the inter-resort traffic of the rest of the Trois Vallées. But at the same time it's suitable for the more advanced, with easy access to a huge variety of terrain tucked away from the main hustle and bustle. The slopes around the altiport area of 1850 are also extremely good for beginners, with mild gradients and easy lifts. There's a wide choice of ski and snowboard schools, but learning from a native English speaker is an advantage. These schools are British-run: BASS Courchevel, Marmalade, Momentum, New Generation, Oxygène, Supreme Ski (now run by Maison Sports), Sweet Snowsports, The Snow School and The Development Centre. After a day on the slopes, or on a day off, there's the Aquamotion complex, easily accessed from Moriond and Village. It has two swimming pools, a spa, an indoor climbing wall and a surf wave. Where to stay Regarding the best accommodation in Courchevel, Le Ski has 22 chalets in Moriond and neighbouring La Tania and 42 years of experience in offering holidays here. Bouquetin is a chalet for six guests in a



secluded spot within a few minutes' walk of the main lift station in Moriond. From £1,294pp chalet half-board, including flights and transfers, with Le Ski. Plan a visit with our Courchevel ski guide. Alternatives Alpe d'Huez, Morzine or Val Cenis all have dedicated nursery slopes out of the way of ski traffic. Serre Chevalier Best for intermediates This is the collective name for a dozen villages along the road from the ancient garrison town of Briançon in the Southern Alps. They share a ski area with a respectable 250km of varied but mainly intermediate slopes, served by 59 lifts. Think of Serre Chevalier as the laid-back, country cousin of A-list resorts further north, such as Val d'Isère or Courchevel – a bit smaller and a bit less hi-tech, but also friendlier, more relaxed and with bags more Gallic character. For skiers stuck on the intermediate plateau, British ski school Eureka Ski can help. It's run by experienced instructor Gavin Crosby and his wife Mel, who offer group lessons on peak dates as well as private coaching all season. Book well in advance. Where to stay Ski-in ski-out Grand Hotel Aigle & Spa is a former eighteenth-century farmhouse set in the attractive village of Villeneuve. From £1,079 half board, including flights and transfers, with Sno. Plan a visit with our Serre Chevalier ski guide. Alternatives Les Arcs, La Plagne, Flaine and Méribel all have extensive blue and red runs that give a feeling of having gone somewhere each day, rather than repeating the same slopes. Val d'Isère Best for experts The resort is spread along a high, remote valley and shares the giant ski area formerly known as Espace Killy with neighbouring Tignes. These days the ski area's name reflects precisely what's inside the tin: Val d'Isère-Tignes. Val d'Isère's village divides into a number of sectors, from the central hub at the base of the main Solaise and Belvedere lifts to the quieter outposts of La Daille, Le Laisinant and Le Fornet. As in any major holiday destination in the Alps, the vast majority of visitors are intermediates, so it's not essential to be an expert to enjoy good times here. However, those who are will – particularly when investing in expert guiding to make the most of the challenging terrain, both on and off piste. Few world-class resorts have such variety. Progression Ski is a British-run school offering the full range of group and private ski and snowboard lessons. Mountain Masters and former French racer Pat Zimmer (00 33 6 12 69 81 82) specialise in off-piste guiding. The slopes of Belvedere, reached by the Olympique jumbo gondola or two chairlifts from the centre, or by high-speed gondola from La Daille, rise up to 2,908m. La Face, the steep and deeply challenging black run down to town, was the venue for the men's downhill at the 1992 Albertville Olympics and the 2009 World Championships. The backside of Belvedere is the starting point for the alternative OK downhill course and an enormous area of varied slopes that lead towards Tignes in one direction and back down to La Daille in the other. New this winter is the Vallon gondola, which transforms access to the Pisailas glacier from above the hamlet of Le Fornet. The journey will now take just 6.5 minutes against the 22 of its cramped predecessor, with 10 seats instead of four in each cabin. Where to stay Chalet Otto is on the ground floor of a chalet building, with four bedrooms sleeping up to eight guests, a living room with log fire, and a sauna. It's located in the town centre, four minutes' walk from the lifts. From £6,900, half board for the whole chalet with YSE, travel not included. Plan a visit with our Val d'Isère ski guide. Alternatives Chamonix has some of the most demanding terrain in the Alps and Sainte Foy is a small resort with a giant off-piste area. Les Arcs Best for reliable snow With slopes going up to nearly 3,250m, Les Arcs' altitude means the ski area is open from mid-December until just before the end of April. The highest of the four hamlets is Arc 2000, but equally snow-reliable Arc 1950 – just below 2000 at 1,950m – is the most attractive place to stay. The most recently built of Les Arcs' four villages – it celebrated its 20th birthday in 2024 – it consists of modern Savoyard-style buildings. You can ski from and to your apartment, and it's traffic-free which makes it attractive for families. The Varet glacier above Arc 2000 is the highest point in the Paradiski ski area that Les Arcs shares with La Plagne. Both resorts are made up of satellites set at varying heights and access 425km of piste in total. They are linked by an impressive double-decker cable car across a gorge. From the high point of Aiguille Rouge at 3,226m above Les Arcs it's possible to drop all the way down to the village of Villaroger in the valley. What most people don't know about is the growing number of excellent mountain eateries, in particular around Arc 1950 and 2000. On the pistes, these include the Bulle Café Les Arcs, which serves an array of fresh seafood at non-exorbitant prices, and the sumptuous Chalets de l'Arc. Where to stay The pick of the residences



in the charming and convenient Arc 1950 Village. The apartments here are more spacious than the French norm, well-furnished, and the reception is staffed 24/7. As well as being ski-in/ski-out, there's a large indoor-outdoor pool, a hot tub, sauna and steam room. From £716 per person, self-catering, based on two people sharing a one-bedroom apartment, travel not included, with Erna Low. Plan a visit with our Les Arcs ski guide. Alternatives Val Thorens, Alpe d'Huez and Tignes are all high resorts that guarantee early-and late-season snow. Megève Best for charm French resorts are usually known for their convenience rather than their charm, so attractive villages with large ski areas are notable in their rarity. Megève is special, with a medieval village centre, colourful horse-drawn sleighs, fabulous restaurants, designer boutiques and excellent après-ski. There's also a wide choice of restaurants on the mountain. The resort's halcyon days were in the 1950s and 1960s when celebrities such as Sasha Distel, Brigitte Bardot, Charles Aznavour, and Johnny Hallyday turned it into the hub of a St Tropez on snow. Megève is part of a large ski area that includes the spa town of St-Gervais as well as the villages of La Giettaz St-Nicolas-de-Véroce. The Evasion Mont Blanc lift pass also includes 120km of pistes in nearby Les Contamines, giving an impressive total of 445km. The disadvantage is its altitude – Megève stands at just 1,113m – very low compared with other major French resorts and, despite its proximity to Mont Blanc, snow cover can be limited. It's best skied in mid-season. Where to stay Four-star Hotel Mont Blanc in the centre of the resort used to be the favourite watering hole of avant garde poet and novelist Jean Cocteau and in the 1950s it was a rendezvous for famous artists. It houses one of Megève's landmark restaurants, Les Enfants Terribles. From £1,995, half board including flights and transfers, with Ski Solutions. Plan a visit with our Megève ski guide. Alternatives Vaujany is a cute little village and is linked into the huge Alpe d'Huez area. Little-known Aussois in the Maurienne Valley is rural France at its simplest and most delightful. Méribel Best for partying There's no denying that the thousands of international visitors who make the journey each winter to this the geographical centre of the giant Trois Vallées ski area know how to party in style – Méribel is its beating heart. A branch of the French après experience, La Folie Douce, at the mid-station of the main Saulire gondola, gets loud at 3pm with a DJ and table-top dancing. The clientele tends to migrate after 5pm to the Rond Point, better known as The Ronny, just above the main village and the must-visit après venue. It has live bands and a fantastic atmosphere. On a good night, dedicated party animals could be crowd surfing by 6pm. Alternatively, Méribel institution Jack's Bar offers up comedy and live bands every evening, while Barometer has a pleasant English pub atmosphere. Later on, La Taverne and Copiña are good warm-up spots for the main clubbing action even later at Sully's Bar & Club or Les Saint Pères. Méribel's local slopes are extensive and mainly intermediate, and give easy access to the rest of the Trois Vallées ski area. The resort has an unrivalled selection of good-quality chalets, although wickedly high prices have led to a sharp fall in the overall visitor numbers in recent years. Where to stay Hotel l'Eterlou is a cosy hotel built in chalet style in the centre of Méribel, 60 metres from the Chaudanne lifts, with the in-house La Grange restaurant, and an outdoor heated swimming-pool. From £1,469, with Inghams. Plan a visit with our Méribel ski guide. Alternatives In the country that gave après ski its name there is remarkably little of it. Val Thorens, Les Deux Alpes and Chamonix are livelier than most resorts and do their best to address the lack of partying with a more extensive range of bars and late-night entertainment. Les Gets Best for families With its village-based nursery slopes, pedestrian-friendly centre and road train shuttle between the main slopes and separate Mont Chéry ski area, this village in the giant Portes du Soleil ski area makes an ideal base for families. The region has oodles of groomed runs – 600km of them to be exact – linked by 208 lifts. There's a huge choice of accommodation, including family-friendly chalets with childcare, and Les Gets itself is a pleasing mixture of old Savoyard chalets and more modern wood-and-stone buildings constructed in keeping with their Alpine surroundings. Child-friendly activities in the village include skating and tenpin bowling. There's also a cinema and the Musique Mécanique Museum, with around 750 exhibits including music boxes, clocks and self-playing pianos. Les Gets is set at a modest 1,172m altitude, which means snow cover is not necessarily reliable at village level throughout the season. It's best to visit in February and March. However, there are more nursery slopes up the mountain at Chavannes,



and the Grand Cry fun park is also here. Les Gets shares a 120km local ski area with Morzine and is part of the giant Portes du Soleil ski area, and the British snow-sports schools BASS, Les Gets Snowsports and Mint Snowboarding operate here. Kindergartens include Les Fripouilles, which caters for children from six months to four years. Where to stay One of the best chalets in Les Gets is Chalet Cocon overlooks the village and it's two minutes' walk from the nearest lift. It sleeps 15 in four family suites and a double room. From £779, with Ski Famille. Full childcare is available. Plan a visit with our Les Gets ski guide. Alternatives La Tania in the Trois Vallées is car-free, although families with little ones need to be wary of people speeding down the main drag towards the gondola. Vaujany is an unspoilt village linking into the Alpe d'Huez ski area with no through traffic and a good crèche. Avoriaz Best for terrain parks This purpose-built resort above Morzine in the massive French/Swiss Portes du Soleil area was largely the brainchild of French racer Jean Vuarnet, better known for his sunglasses than for his gold medal at the Squaw Valley Olympics in 1960. Accommodation is mainly ski-in ski-out apartments, many of which have been renovated in recent years. Avoriaz has a quirky charm and a varied array of terrain parks – five, plus a superpipe. Snowboarding made its European debut in Avoriaz in the late 1980s and the resort built the first halfpipe in Europe in 1993. Facilities have come a long way since then. Park novices can learn first turns at the Chapelle park, which has kicker lines from green to red along with boxes and rails, before progressing to the pro lines and airbag in the Arare park. In the Stash park all features are made from wood and there are three lines of varying difficulty snaking through the forest. Avoriaz also has two parks especially for kids, Lil'Stash, and the Burton Kids Parkway. The Portes du Soleil's variety of slopes suits everyone, from complete beginners to veteran powderhounds, and Avoriaz makes a good base for easy access to all of it. High and rocky, the resort is a great destination in a good snow year, much less so when the snow is thin on the lower slopes. Where to stay Ski-in/ski-out and essentially quirky, Hotel Des Dromonts is a funky throwback to the days of Deneuve and Vadim with plenty of retro chic and two good restaurants to choose from – it's one of the best hotels in Avoriaz. The owner of the sports shop opposite once skied down the not-quite-vertical side of the hotel and lived to tell the tale. From £1,469, half board, with Inghams. Plan a visit with our Avoriaz ski guide. Alternatives The Portes du Soleil has a total of 30 parks including boardercross and ski cross. Tignes and La Plagne also both have large parks with extensive features. Ax-les-Thermes Best for value The attractive old town of Ax-les-Thermes, in the Ariège area of the Pyrenees, is a great choice for a value holiday since it's not a mainstream or fashionable ski resort of the Alps. It is only 90 minutes' drive from Toulouse airport and so it's convenient for a long weekend or mid-week break. The town lies at just 720m from where a gondola to 1,400m accesses the start of the ski area, which is divided into three connected sectors. Bonascre is home to a host of easy green beginner slopes and some long flattering blues. Saquet, accessed by gondola or a six-person chairlift, goes up to a respectable 2,350m and has great red and black runs beneath the Tute and Ours chairs. On fresh powder days there is easily accessible off piste through the trees. Further over lies the Domaine des Campels sector, reached by the long sweeping blue Savis piste or a choice of much steeper and more demanding reds and blacks. In terms of size, the slopes here are no match for the giant connected areas of the Alps, but there's plenty to keep beginners and intermediates happy for a week, and in good snow conditions the freeriding will entertain the more advanced. There is also an extensive cross-country ski area at Chioula, a short bus-ride away. The town is famous for its thermal baths, les Bains de Couloubret, with 60 hot springs. Visitors can soak in the thermal spa waters here for €20 for two hours, or use the free foot spa. On-slope eating is a lot cheaper than in the Alps and, with the proximity to the frontier, there's a big Spanish influence in the tapas bars lining the attractive streets. The two ski schools here are the ESF and ESI. Where to stay Three-star Les Trois Domaines apartments are right next to the gondola leading up to the ski area. From €324 for a self-catering studio sleeping two people, with Pierre et Vacances. Alternatives St-Lary, also in the Pyrenees, is a sensibly-priced alternative. Puy St Vincent in the Southern Alps is loved by French families who count their euros carefully. La Clusaz Best for weekends Close to Lake Annécý and within an easy hour's drive of Geneva airport, La Clusaz has well-groomed intermediate and



advanced slopes that are all too often overlooked by skiers and snowboarders driving past on their way towards the Trois Vallées and the other famous Tarentaise resorts. La Clusaz and smaller Manigod share 132km of groomed runs; 10 minutes away by free shuttle bus are those of Le Grand Bornand and its lift-linked satellite village, St Jean de Sixt. All four are covered by the same Aravis lift pass and comprise a total 212km of terrain. The altitude is low at all four resorts, but their proximity to Mont Blanc creates a micro-climate and snow cover is considerably more reliable than in their high-altitude counterparts in the Tarentaise. Most of the slopes are intermediate, but the La Balme area of La Clusaz offers long runs and considerable challenges. Le Grand Bornand has a dedicated freeride area at the back of Mont Lachat de Châtillon that is neither patrolled nor groomed, but is avalanche protected. It is sufficiently extensive and challenging to satisfy even the most demanding visitor. A 200m covered magic carpet lift makes the Rosay plateau area, in Le Grand Bornand, very accessible for beginners. As well as making La Clusaz an ideal spot for the weekend, airport convenience explains in part why so many Britons have bought chalets and apartments here. However, their presence is muted – these resorts are mainly frequented by the French, and unlike in some of the big name resorts, holidaying here feels like you're in France. La Clusaz has a life beyond snow and is a thriving year-round community. Le Grand Bornand is the home of Reblochon cheese, an inescapable inclusion in all its varied forms, from fondue to raclette, on every restaurant menu in the region. Where to stay Four-star Hotel Beauregard is located in the upper part of the resort at the foot of the slopes. It has a wellness area with a pool, sauna, steam room and hot tub. From £1,076, half board, including Eurotunnel crossings, with Peak Retreats. Alternatives Morzine and Megève are both within a 90-minute drive of Geneva Airport. Unless stated otherwise, package prices are per person, based on two sharing a double or twin room, half-board, for seven nights, including flights and transfers. This article was first published in November 2022, and has been revised and updated.