



18 of the best family ski resorts in Europe

Searching for the perfect base for a family skiing holiday? We've gathered a selection of the best to make hitting the slopes as easy as possible

The recipe for a successful family ski holiday is appealingly straightforward. Lots of beginner or intermediate slopes. A good range of child-friendly restaurants. Perhaps a creche or bowling alley. Peace and quiet. Factor in superb scenery plus plenty of exercise and, for many families, holidays on the pistes offer an ideal mixture of challenge and adventure. Still, even die-hard downhillers will tell you that such an enterprise nevertheless takes effort and planning. Avoiding booming party towns and low-altitude resorts that are slushy at Easter, this guide to the best options in Europe will save you a lot of trouble down the line. Main photo: on the slopes at La Rosière 1. Tignes, France Best for Easter holidays for every level of skier On a sunny day in any week of the season, high-altitude Tignes is a joy to ski. There's a good area of nursery slopes at Tignes Le Lac, several exceptionally broad and ego-boosting intermediate pistes and a mouthwatering choice of off-piste lines for those who can ski powder or who want to give it a try (with the help of an instructor or a guide, of course). But it's over Easter that Tignes really shines as a resort for families. When lower and more sheltered resorts are turning slushy in the spring warmth, you can still find cold, firm snow to ski on. Learn how to exploit the way spring snow changes over the course of the day and it becomes properly brilliant. There is one caveat. When the clouds come down, or it's blowing a blizzard, the whole world turns a milky white: and by lunchtime you'll be ready to throw in the towel and try something else. So book into the area of Tignes Le Lac if you can. It's home to Le Lagon, the resort's public swimming pool — where three side-by-side waterslides are the perfect antidote to zero visibility on the snow. (There are also several hotels and residences with their own pools, although none can match Le Lagon for size.) 2. Les Arcs, France Best for wraparound, family-friendly accommodation Les Arcs is full of intermediate-level skiing. But what really singles it out among family-friendly ski resorts is its accommodation. Two developments in particular are world-class. The first is Arc1950. A purpose-built "village" of self-catering apartments, it wraps around a long, traffic-free plaza, where you'll find everything from restaurants and bakeries to equipment hire, as well as almost-instant access to the skiing from the door of every boot room. Even better is the vast and all-inclusive Club Med at Arc 1600, where all your needs are catered for in-house. Here, it's the food that seduces you first: endless buffets await at every mealtime — you'll need an iron will not to put on weight. But ultimately, it's the effortlessness of the experience that you'll appreciate most, as you deliver your children each morning to their bright-eyed kids' club managers, then saunter through the boot room and out onto the piste that runs alongside. Even ski lessons are included in the price of your holiday, and you don't have to go looking for your instructors. Twice a day, you'll find them waiting, just outside the door. 3. Les Menuires, France Best for fun activities when the lifts have shut Like many purpose-built ski resorts in France, Les Menuires is no looker. But don't let its multi-storey core blind you to its many virtues. The most obvious are its off-slope facilities, which include two public swimming pools, the Speed Mountain Alpine coaster and a giant soft play area perfect for the under-sevens. But just as important is the little cluster of Brit-friendly chalets up at Reberty 2000. Here, in the highest part of the resort, you'll find catered accommodation with on-site child care and both a family-friendly restaurant and a ski school nursery slope next door. For first-time families, it's a cute and self-contained little enclave, and once the children are settled into ski lessons, parents can launch themselves into the giant Three Valleys ski area. To make full use of their lift pass, they'll want to ski as far as Courchevel — even if, by the end of the holiday, they may decide that many of the area's best pistes are right on the doorstep of Les Menuires. • Best ski resorts in France 4. La Rosière, France Best for easy skiing and a relaxed atmosphere La Rosière has put on a growth spurt of late and has acquired a mountain of lift-serviced skiing as well as a £94 million Club Med. That hasn't,



however, fundamentally changed its nature. This is still an eye-wateringly pretty enclave, which has lots of easy skiing, a relaxed, end-of-the-road atmosphere, and the chance to commute across the Italian border to slurp on pasta and test yourself against the steeper pistes of neighbouring La Thuile. But now it offers state-of-the-art all-inclusive holidays as well. The view, by the way, is extraordinary: across the Tarentaise valley towards several of the most famous ski resorts on the planet: Val d'Isère, Les Arcs and La Plagne among them. You can't help but gaze in wonder. Not least because most of the skiers on the other side of the valley have no idea that La Rosière exists.

5. Puy St Vincent, France Best for low-ish prices and a Brit-friendly ski school There should be more resorts in France like Puy St Vincent. Small, varied and far from A-list destinations such as Val d'Isère, it's home to a single-resort tour operator whose sole purpose is to deliver (relatively) affordable ski holidays to British families. It checks its guests into slopeside self-catering apartments, and lays on an English-speaking crèche, an exclusive ski school and lunchtime picnics so both parents and children can mingle. And that — pretty much — is that. It's a simple formula, but a successful one. Snowbizz holidays, especially for New Year and February half-term, are sold out months in advance.

6. Serfaus, Austria Best for a tailor-made beginner area and child-friendly hotels Heaven knows why Serfaus in Austria doesn't have a bigger following among Brits. Perched on a sunny balcony of snow, and linked to the neighbouring resorts of Fiss and Ladis, it bends over backwards to make young families welcome. The village itself is traffic-free and served by an underground railway — and is home to several child-friendly hotels. The Hotel Bär is the star of the show, offering not just kids' clubs and swimming pools but a 96m waterslide, a climbing wall, and five-storey soft-play tower. Meanwhile halfway up the ski slopes the Kinderschneealm beckons — complete with easy, magic-carpet lifts and a team of instructors whose sole purpose is to get little ones to link their snowplough turns. Admittedly the southeast-facing aspect of many of the intermediate-friendly slopes means that Serfaus is best skied over Christmas or in February, rather than at Easter. But if they get their timing right, energetic families will have a ball, with a zip wire and Alpine coaster adding to the fun when they're done with skiing.

7. Gurgl, Austria Best for early or late-season holidays and comfortable family-run hotels Set at the far end of the long, deep Otztal valley, hard up against the main Alpine ridge, Gurgl is as snowsure as an Austrian resort gets without offering lift-serviced glacier skiing. What's more, along with soaring mountain scenery and pistes as wide and inviting as Vienna's Ringstrasse, it's equipped with two clusters of well-run, child-friendly hotels. With both Christmas and Easter so reliable, and the accommodation so comfortable, it's no wonder well-heeled Brits are among its most loyal guests. In some cases, its ski school has taught three generations of the same family.

8. Galtur, Austria Best for quiet pistes and lots of on-slope activities Galtur is the kind of resort many parents dream of but rarely find: a quiet, end-of-the-line place, set beneath proper, pyramid-shaped peaks, with just enough skiing on tap to keep everyone entertained for a week. The pistes suit beginners and intermediates best. At Siggis Bambiniland, you'll find a secluded, kids-only area of nursery slopes, while more confident youngsters will enjoy the themed zones higher up. These start with gentle discovery trails and progress to the banked turns of the Yippy Yeah racetrack and the kickers, rails and jumps of the Silvapark. The main drawback is that the ski area lies a mile away from the main village. Unless you're staying in one of a handful of slopeside hotels, you'll need to catch a shuttle bus at the beginning and end of the day. It is, however, a small price to pay for old-school Alpine charm — provided you focus on mid-winter holidays. Galtur's altitude is quite low for an Easter trip.

• Best ski resorts in Austria

9. Champoluc, Italy Best for first-timers and adventurous intermediates For the most part, the Monterosa ski area is a bastion of hell-for-leather skiing, both on-piste and off. And no wonder, given it clings to the side of the Alps' second-highest mountain. But at Champoluc, on its western edge, the mood softens markedly. Here, in a winding, wooded valley, a bustling village gathers around a single gondola — and sends guests off up the mountain to a ledge of gentle nursery slopes. Higher up, longer intermediate-friendly pistes beckon, and anyone with a sense of adventure will love pushing on towards the high mountain pass at the Colle Bettaforca. Back at base, the resort has long experience of catering to British needs. Family-skiing specialist Esprit has a base at the Hotel de Champoluc, right next door to the ski lift.

10. San Cassiano, Italy



Best for easy-skiing pistes and the odd blowout lunch for parents Jump on the gondola at the southern end of pretty San Cassiano in Italy and you're whisked uphill to one of skiing's most distinctive and memorable plateaux (even if it is too low for Easter skiing). That's not so much because of the pistes, although if you're a cautious intermediate you'll love their gentle rolling pitch. It's the view. Known as the Amphitheatre of the Dolomites, this undulating stretch of forest and meadows serves up staggering views of sheer cliffs and towering spires of rock at every turn. In fact, it's so beautiful you'll want to sit down and get a proper look, which is probably why you'll also find some of the best mountain restaurants in the Alps up here. Wine from the Adige valley, fish from the Adriatic, venison and mushrooms from the surrounding woods and field: each draws on a rich larder of ingredients, and if the grown-ups are aching for a bit of me-time and a proper sit-down lunch, they'll be well-served. As for the kids — well, let's just say the local ski school offers extended lessons from Monday to Wednesday that include a midday meal. • Best ski resorts in Italy 11. Courchevel, France Best for swimming pools and tobogganing In recent years, Courchevel has added two impressive pieces of family-friendly infrastructure to its slopes. First came Aquamotion — a £54 million spa and indoor water park, which includes water slides, indoor surfing, a climbing wall and every conceivable kind of pool. Second, Moriond Racing turbo-charged the local tobogganing scene with a 1.8-mile luge track of tunnels, banked turns and weaving, interconnected tracks that will leave you helpless with laughter (or possibly buried in a snowdrift). Both are close to the suburb of Courchevel Moriond (aka Courchevel 1650). So this is the obvious place to base yourself for a holiday, any time between Christmas and late March — with the added bonus of a highly rated international ski school (New Generation) and a profusion of easy-skiing pistes. 12. Auffach, Austria Best for inexpensive hotel-based holidays Looking for a low-key ski area, with pretty scenery, uncrowded pistes and plenty of trees? Look no further than Auffach. Set in a patchwork landscape of snow-decked Alpine meadows and carefully managed forests, it lies just north of popular Alpbach, and is part of the same Ski Juwel lift system. But it's overlooked by almost everyone — and home to a handful of inexpensive, family-run hotels as well as a newly expanded area of nursery slopes. There's some good intermediate skiing here too, notably on the Schatzberg, not far above the beginners' pistes. Just be sure to ski here in January or February rather than mid-December or in the spring. The highest lift reaches only to 2,025m, which is too low for an early or late-season trip. 13. Obertilliach, Austria Best for Alpine charm If you recoil at the idea of a big, bustling ski resort — and long for an old-fashioned, unhurried introduction to skiing, Obertilliach is the place. In Austria's under-visited Osttirol, it's a bit fiddly to reach (from either Innsbruck or Verona airport), and is too low for an early or late-season holiday. But if you head there in January or February, you should find this farming village decked in snow — and so pretty you'll want to just sit and soak it all up for the first couple of hours. The Almfamilyhotel Scherer is the place to stay — for its indoor swimming pool, kids' club and instant access to the nursery slopes. But don't let that stop you from exploring Obertilliach's historic core, where families chat across balconies and tractors are parked alongside 4x4s. Just remember: ski resorts aren't normally like this. You may find the rattle and hum of your next one a bit of a shock. 14. Val d'Isère, France Best for mixed-ability families Many experienced skiers will scoff at the inclusion of Val d'Isère in this list, but the hard-skiing, hard-partying A-lister has worked hard in recent years to broaden its appeal. If used properly, it works well for families that include both gung-ho and hesitant skiers. However, the caveats are important. The first is that both beginners and intermediates should always ride the lifts back down into the resort: because it's on the plunging valley runs that Val's hell-for-leather reputation has been forged. The second is that they should stay close to the central Front de Neige nursery slopes and the gondola up to the easy-skiing plateau on the Solaise, at a snowsure 2,500m. Third is that they should be well-resourced. Val d'Isère is not cheap. Bearing all that in mind, they can then let rip. The thrill-seekers will feast on the super-steep Face, while their easy-skiing relatives will enjoy not just the Solaise, but the flattish plateau on the other side of the valley too. Both are equipped with slow-skiing zones. Then at the end of the day everyone can splash together in the public pool. 15. La Thuile, Italy Best for mixed-ability families on a budget If you like the sound of Val d'Isère's mix of feisty and soothing pistes, but balk at its A-list



prices, consider La Thuile. The skiing is on a smaller scale, but there's no doubting the mixed-ability appeal of its slopes. Halfway up the mountain, a northeast-facing balcony of snow offers reliable cover as well as several gentle pistes for improving beginners and early intermediates. Meanwhile, both above and below this area the slopes are steeper, culminating in the scintillating (and north-facing) Franco Berthod World Cup race track. Pluckier skiers in the family will also relish skiing over to neighbouring La Rosière in France, even if they won't find anything there as challenging as their home run in La Thuile. Price-wise, the appeal is multi-faceted too. Not only does the piste-side Planibel development offer convenient and inexpensive self-catering apartments, as well as a swimming pool, lift passes for the under-eights are free.

16. Cervinia, Italy Best for Easter skiing for beginners and intermediates Like many high-altitude ski resorts, Cervinia can be a bleak and windy place in a snowstorm. But on a sunny day over Easter there are few more spectacular or ego-boosting places to ski. You can thank the towering spike of Monte Cervino (aka the Matterhorn) for the scenery — and the vast, gently sloping bowl beneath it for its long and gentle pistes. There are nursery slopes next to the main area of (mid-priced, family-run) hotels at around 2,050m, and it's here that a family of first-timers should base themselves. But most skiers will quickly progress to the higher Plan Maison area, above 2,500m, to ski the central section of easy snow. By the end of the week, they may even fancy a day trip across the Swiss-Italian border to Zermatt, where they can glide down the pisted surface of a glacier. Few other European ski resorts can match the top-of-the-world buzz it brings.

17. Jasna, Slovakia Best for attentive nursery-slope instructors When it comes to eastern European resorts, Jasna is something of a mould-breaker. Its narrow slice of the Low Tatras mountains is small by Alpine standards and much of the accommodation is a bus ride (or transfer by private shuttle) from the snow. But the ski area is packed with variety, and served by a fast, modern lift system as well as a painstaking ski school. The younger instructors, in particular, are a dream: kind and patient on the nursery slopes, and effective and engaging when skiing with older kids, as they perfect their parallel turns on Jasna's impressive top-to-bottom, red-rated piste. Mind you, it probably won't be the skiing your brood will talk about when you get back home. They'll be too busy raving about Tatalandia, the vast, multifaceted and ever-so-slightly bonkers indoor waterpark in the nearby town of Liptovsky Mikulas. It even serves poolside pancakes.

18. Val Cenis, France Best for affordable self-catering holidays For years, canny French families have been driving to the top end of the Maurienne Valley for their ski holidays. Up there, Val Cenis has everything they need: slope-side self-catering apartments, inexpensive mountain restaurants and a mid-sized, well-balanced ski area that holds its snow well. The pin-up piste is l'Escargot which is the longest beginner run in the French Alps and follows the snowed-over D1006 road from Italy — it also gives beginners a big-mountain experience within days of their first snowplough turn. Meanwhile, more experienced skiers can feast on several long and feisty intermediate pistes. There are more nearby too, courtesy of a six-day lift pass that provides a free day's skiing in four neighbouring downhill resorts. Given the low prices and uncrowded slopes, it's hard not to feel you've discovered a secret kingdom of snow, just ten miles as the raven flies from the glitzy Three Valleys.

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