



50 TOP ALPINE CHALETS

Daily
Telegraph

Travel

27/11/2010

*From cheap and cheerful to truly lavish, our ski expert **Peter Hardy** picks the finest places to stay*

The ski-chalet party is alive and flourishing across the Alps this winter – at both ends of the financial spectrum. You can book a room half board, or a whole chocolate-box chalet with gourmet cuisine, with or without flights and transfers.

Whether your budget for a week is £500 or £85,000, this wholly British invention remains the most enjoyable and – at the lower end of the scale – most economical way of going skiing.

"I have hired a chalet in Grindelwald," said the first chalet company advertisement in 1958 in this newspaper. It was placed by Colin Murison-Small, who is credited with having invented the concept. The advertisement went on: "An English girl, Loveday, who will be living in the chalet for the whole season, will feed you and will do all she can to make you comfortable and keep you happy. In addition to continental breakfast, lunch

and dinner, you will be welcome to have tea with bread and butter and jam at no extra charge, although you will have to buy your own cakes."

Murison-Small's army of young unqualified "Muribirds" nightly conducted culinary experiments from the tear-smudged pages of a cookbook borrowed from Mama.

Times change. Today's chalet host is increasingly likely to be a highly qualified chef who will serve breakfast, tea and a four-course dinner with wine. En-suite bathrooms, flat-screen television and free Wi-Fi are the norm.

Apart from the mass-market operators – Inghams, Crystal, Thomson, First Choice and Neilson – there is a host of smaller operators and private individuals offering superb rental homes on snow, which range from the sublime to the simple.

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The Chalet at 11 East Obergurgl EE

Fully renovated for this season and right by the children's ski school. Sleeps eight, plus two in a bunk room. Cinema and free bar from where you can watch your children ski. From £14,000. Chalet at 11 East (01483 894183; www.chalet11.co.uk).