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+ EVERYBODY SKI! Great breaks for beginners, bargain-hunters, parents and pros...



Waistline, want not: blueberry pancakes deliver the requisite post-piste injection of calories

I was finishing off my pork cutlet that I realised I'd left my wallet in the chalet. We'd grown so pampered, it hadn't seemed important. Now I feared our romantic meal would end with us washing up.

A quick call to the chalet confirmed that a taxi would be waiting below. Would the restaurant allow me to leave my watch as security? (Diamond-encrusted it was not.) In such instances, humans are generally the preferred collateral. So I left my partner twiddling with his salad and did a quick James Bond-style descent. It all went so smoothly. I was back at the restaurant in time for coffee. The best thing? We now had the money to order blueberry pancakes, our favourite pudding.

The next day our driver was waiting to whisk us to Corviglia, the main ski area. My partner had, earlier in our stay, fallen for the way its immaculately-pisted runs flattered his every turn. This is where adrenaline-seekers take their life in their hands, attempting the St Moritz Cresta Run – the infamous toboggan race back into town. But today our hearts weren't in it, so we just completed a couple of turns then rode the rack railway down to the cobbled streets for that other time-honoured ski-weekend pursuit: a stroll around the shops.

While my partner wasn't looking, I slipped off for a closer look at a vase on sale for £45. The ideal present! Next day, as we pulled away for the airport, I presented him with his gift. Not the vase – on closer inspection it had turned out to be £45,000. So he got a St Moritz fridge magnet instead. Cool and unexpected – the perfect summation of our stay. ■

GO INDEPENDENT

The nearest international airport to St Moritz is Zürich. **Swiss** (0845 601 0956, www.swiss.com) flies from Heathrow, City, Birmingham and Manchester from £112 return. The **Swiss Transfer Ticket** (00800 1002 0030, www.myswitzerland.com) offers a return rail trip between any airport and any Swiss destination for £95 (or £142 First Class).

WHERE TO STAY

The **Chesetta** (00 41 79 538 7996, www.chesetta-stmoritz.com) has seven nights from £3,000pp, half board, including chef and housekeeper, based on 12 sharing. The lakeside **Waldhaus-am-See** (00 41 81 836 6000, www.waldhaus-am-see.ch) has doubles from £905 a week, half board.

GO PACKAGED

The **Oxford Ski Company** (01865 398130, www.oxfordski.com) has seven nights at the Chesetta from £3,040pp, based on 12 people sharing, including flights from Heathrow to Zürich.

Four more glam ski resorts



Gstaad, Switzerland

In a nutshell: Here's a resort that prefers to muffle its wealth (albeit in chinchilla). So the unveiling of a luxury lodge had Gstaad agog. After a multi-million-euro facelift, the old Grand Hotel Park (pictured) cast off its renovation drapes to reveal a Hollywood fantasy, with snow-laden gardens, fairy lights, interiors of unscrubbed timber and black-hide rugs, a spa peddling treatments based on Swiss chocolate, and impeccable service. This season, Gstaad is in a league of its own.

Get me there: *Exosphere* (020 7591 4972, www.exosphere.com) has three nights at *Grand Hotel Park* from £1,850pp. B&B, including flights from Gatwick to Geneva and private transfers.



Chamonix, France

In a nutshell: Just an hour from Geneva, Chamonix has some of the Alps' most thrilling off-piste skiing. The spectacular 20km Vallée Blanche, stretching across the Mer de Glace ice field, can be tackled by confident intermediates led by a guide. Some guiding companies offer a glam extra – picnics on the ice field itself (www.chamonix-seminaires.com). And Chamonix's charming cobbled old town offers plenty for non-skiers.

Get me there: *High Mountain Holidays* (01993 775540, www.highmountain.co.uk) has seven nights' at *Chalet Rimaye* from £390pp, B&B, based on eight sharing, including flights from Gatwick to Geneva and private transfers.



Méribel, France

In a nutshell: At the heart of the biggest ski area in the world, Méribel lies snuggled into a steep-sided valley dotted with traditional wooden chalets and snow-dusted pine trees. A maze of pretty pistes skirt the village. Get a bird's-eye view of the mountain by booking a scenic flight at the altiport (www.ac-meribel.com, from £35pp). You'll get to snoop on the resort's oodles of fancy chalets,

with saunas and hot tubs on sundecks, snooker tables and even steaming swimming pools. **Get me there:** *VIP Ski* (0844 557 3119, www.vip-chalets.com) has seven nights at *Club Pierre* from £829pp, half board, including flights from Gatwick to Grenoble and transfers.



Obergurgl, Austria

In a nutshell: A clutch of luxe pads are popping up in Austria and, in the middle of Obergurgl, right by the start of its 110km of pistes, lies new British-run boutique chalet, 11° East. Expect knockout views, stylish interiors and warm service. The real stars of this resort are the spas, such as the trad thermal one in nearby Langenfeld (www.aqua-dome.at).

Get me there: *BA* (0844 493 0787, www.ba.com) flies from Gatwick to Innsbruck from £98 return. Transfers £35 one-way (www.oetztal.com). Seven nights at *The Chalet at 11° East* (01483 894183, www.chalet11.co.uk) from £1,400pp, half board. **By Colin Nicholson and Nick Redman**