

# The top 50

With the new season fast approaching, Felice Hardy chooses the best resorts for experienced winter sports fans and those taking their first steps on the slopes

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**Felice Hardy**

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Verbier

## Budget

### St Lary, France

A typically Pyrenean village of stone-built houses set along a narrow main street, with skiing suitable for beginners to intermediates.

**Where to book:** Lagrange (020-7371 6111 ([Lagrange-Holidays](#))). From £111 in a studio for two in the Résitel apartments above the resort, including ferry crossings.

### Briançon, France

The ancient garrison town is part of the Serre Chevalier ski circuit linking the dozen villages along the valley road. Prices in the area are considerably lower than in their more fashionable counterparts in the northern Alps.

**Where to book:** Leisure Direction (0870 4429842, [Leisure Direction](#)). From £179 in a studio for four, including ferry.

### Soldeu, Andorra

Soldeu and the linked resort of El Tarter provide the best combination of skiing, accommodation and ambience of any resort in Andorra. The nightlife is good value, and the ski school has a good reputation.

**Where to book:** Panorama 0870 7505060 ([Panorama](#)). From £229 in a two-bedroom apartment.

### Valmeinier 1800, France

The ski area links the resorts of Valloire with Valmeinier, 1,500m and 1,800m respectively, to create one of the largest ski areas in the Maurienne Valley - some of the runs are as long as 1,000 vertical metres. Valmeinier 1800 offers the charm of an Alpine town combined with modern facilities.

**Where to book:** Ski Life (08704 292180, [Ski Life](#)). From £246 in a studio for three,

Vallées area, with its 200 lifts and 600km of piste. The gondola that whisks you up to the ski area is a five-minute walk from the Hotel Le Verseau.

**Where to book:** Harris Holidays (0870 4423400, [Harris Holidays](#)). From £299 half-board, including coach travel and a lift pass.

## Luxury

### Morzine, France

Chalet Les Fys is an attractive timber and stone chalet with vast windows on three sides and offering breathtaking views. The chalet is on the piste so you can ski to and from the door. Luggage is taken up by snowmobile.

**Where to book:** Snowline (020-8870 4807, [Snowline](#)). From £399 half-board.

### Zermatt, Switzerland

The Ski Company's newest property is above Zermatt with its superlative scenery, excellent mountain restaurants such as Chez Vroni and Zum See, and lively après-ski. Haus Matt is a stylish penthouse apartment for six, designed to give maximum light.

**Where to book:** The Ski Company (01451 843123, [Ski Company](#)). From £669 half-board.

### Cervinia, Italy

Hotel Hermitage has the overwhelmingly relaxed atmosphere of a family home with the emphasis on impeccable service. The hotel's restaurant is acknowledged as the best in the resort.

**Where to book:** Elegant Resorts (01244 897333, [Elegant Resorts](#)). From £1,070 half-board, not including transfers.

### Verbier, Switzerland

Verbier has some of the most luxurious chalets in the Alps. Pretty Chalet Jincos has four bedrooms, all with wooden beams and floors. The chalet has a heated terrace and private underground parking.

**Where to book:** Descent International (020-7384 3854, [Descent](#)). From £11,000 (£1,375pp) for the whole chalet half-board.

### Val d'Isère, France

The fashionable resort for experienced skiers has some of the most comfortable chalets around, and certainly no expense has been spared in creating Eagle's Nest. It took £5 million and the reclaimed timbers from 12 Bosnian barns to build the chalet. Extras include a £100,000 sound system and a vast plasma TV screen.

**Where to book:** Scott Dunn Ski (020-8682 5050, [Scott Dunn Ski](#)). From £895 half-board.

## Families

### The Portes du Soleil, France

Chalet L'Eau Vive, in the hamlet of Ardent in the Portes du Soleil, houses a crèche for pre-school children. Older offspring can join Powder Hounds ski classes in the morning followed by indoor and outdoor games.

**Where to book:** Family Ski Company (01684 540333, [Family Ski Company](#)). From £220 half-board, not including travel. Crèche and Powder Hounds both £205 for six days including lunch.

### Selva, Italy

Chalet Waldeck has its own in-house nursery, and Snow Club afternoon activities for older children after their Sprites morning ski classes.

**Where to book:** Esprit (01252 618300, [Esprit](#)). From £389 half-board. Nursery £140 for six days, Sprites £110 for six mornings, Snow Club £90 for six afternoons, supervised lunch £35 for six days.

### **Les Deux Alpes, France**

The sprawling French resort of Les Deux Alpes has skiing that goes up to 3,600m and vibrant après-ski. Chaletotel Les Marmottes has excellent childcare, and contains a bowling alley and swimming pool.

**Where to book:** Mark Warner (0870 7704226, [Mark Warner](#)). From £415 half-board. Creche and nursery £200, afternoon club £140; all for six days.

### **La Tania, France**

This attractive village is a purpose-built addition to the Trois Vallées providing a welcome alternative base for the price conscious. Chalet Titania is set in the woods above the resort and was designed and decorated by a Finnish architect. The creche is staffed by five nannies.

**Where to book:** Le Ski (0870 7544444, [Le Ski](#)). From £419 half-board. Childcare £150 for six days including lunch.

### **Söll, Austria**

Hotel Tyrol is a comfortable inn with nannies to look after little ones from six weeks old. The Owl Club is for older children, and combines skiing with play.

**Where to book:** Owl Club includes ski hire. Ski Hillwood (01923 290700, [Ski Hillwood](#)). From £485 half-board. The creche and Owl Club cost £180 for six days including lunch.

### **Atmospheric/ pretty resorts**

#### **Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy**

The old town has large frescoed buildings combined with a backdrop of craggy Dolomite mountains, creating one of the most atmospheric ski resorts in the world. Not all of Cortina's visitors are here to ski - instead, they shop on the pedestrianised Corso Italia, and relax in the many restaurants and bars.

**Where to book:** Inghams (020-8780 4433, [Inghams](#)). From £492 B&B at Hotel Capannina.

#### **Mürren, Switzerland**

Mürren has few rivals as the prettiest and most unspoilt ski village in Switzerland. Perched on the edge of the Lauterbrunnen valley, the resort can only be reached by mountain railway or cable-car, so it is traffic-free. Old chalets and hotels line the paths between the railway station at one end of the village and the cable-car at the other.

**Where to book:** Swiss Travel Service (0870 1917175, [Swiss Travel Service](#)). From £506 half-board at Hotel Blumental.

#### **Méribel, France**

The resort was founded by the Englishman, Colonel Peter Lindsay, in 1938 and, amazingly, it has stayed faithful to his original concept of a traditional alpine village. Every building has been constructed in local stone and wood in harmony with the mountain setting.

**Where to book:** Meriski (01451 843100, [Meriski](#)). From £539 half-board at Chalet John Christmas.

## **Jackson Hole, Wyoming**

The Wild West town of Jackson has wooden boardwalks and shops selling cowboy clothing, and the central square is crowned by an arch of naturally discarded elk antlers. The ski area at Teton Village contains some of the most spectacular skiing.

**Where to book:** Ski the American Dream (020-8552 1201, [Ski Dream](#)). From £619 B&B at the Parkway Inn.

## **Villars, Switzerland**

A pretty little village set on a sunny balcony 90 minutes drive from Geneva. It is reached by a choice of winding road or a quaint Edwardian mountain railway. The tree-lined ski area is linked with the neighbouring resorts of Gryon and Les Diablerets, providing a total of 45 lifts.

**Where to book:** Powder Byrne (020-8246 5300, [Powder Byrne](#)). From £974 half-board at Hotel Bristol.

## **Lively nightlife**

### **St Anton, Austria**

The après-ski scene starts to warm up at lunchtime, and the Australian-owned Krazy Kanguruh bar is where everyone stops on their final descent to the resort. The village has a permanent party atmosphere with a wide choice of bars and nightclubs.

**Where to book:** First Choice (0870 7543477, [First Choice](#)). From £475 half-board at Chalet Rathia.

### **Hopfgarten, Austria**

Linked by lift into the vast Ski-Welt area, the village has a low-key atmosphere that lends it considerable charm. Tour operator Contiki organises its own après-ski, with activities such as tobogganing, ice skating, floodlit skiing - and "crazy competitions". Singles are welcome.

**Where to book:** Contiki (020-8290 6422, [Contiki](#)). From £229 B&B, including coach travel.

### **Mayrhofen, Austria**

Mayrhofen claims to suit everyone - with varied skiing, exemplary childcare, and buzzing après-ski - and more than 90% of the resort's winter visitors come from the UK. The Ice Bar, which stands at the foot of the Penken gondola, is Europe's biggest single sales point for Grolsch beer.

**Where to book:** Thomson (0870 6061470, [Thomson](#)). From £275 B&B in Hotel Obermair.

### **Sauze d'Oulx, Italy**

The nightlife is so renowned that the skiing is often overlooked. However the slopes are superb, and link into the Milky Way area providing a total of 400km of piste. After skiing, the New Scotch Bar attracts the early evening crowd, and entry to all clubs is free.

**Where to book:** Equity Ski (01273 298298, [Equity Ski](#)). From £500 half-board at Hotel Palace, including lift passes, ski tuition, insurance, and equipment hire.

### **Val Thorens, France**

Club Med organises Crazy Weeks for singles at its village in Val Thorens, but even outside those weeks, the village is for adults only. After a day on the slopes, it's time for some après-ski - the club has a swimming-pool, fitness centre, tennis and squash.

**Where to book:** Club Med (08453 676767, [Club Med](#)). From £569, including instruction, equipment hire, and meals.

## **Weekend breaks**

### **Chamonix, France**

Chamonix is a convenient 60-minute drive from Geneva, and is also one of the easiest ski resorts to reach by road from the UK. The skiing is divided among five main areas, so a car is a useful addition, although buses are frequent.

**Where to book:** Motours (01892 677777, [Motours](#)). From £134 for three nights' half-board at Hotel Excelsior, including ferry.

### **Courmayeur, Italy**

The delightful old village of Courmayeur is only 90 minutes' drive from Geneva. The heart of the village is a maze of cobbled alleyways, and there are more bars, cafés and restaurants than you could possibly visit in a month.

**Where to book:** Momentum Ski (020-7371 9111, [Momentum Ski](#)). From £359 for three nights' B&B at [Hotel Bouton d'Or](#), including car hire.

### **Pertisau, Austria**

The lakeside village is less than two hours from Munich and is perfect for a relaxing weekend. It has a small downhill ski area, 150km of cross-country trails, and some delightful walks. Hotel Wiesenhof was once a farm with a few guest rooms that has evolved into a comfortable hotel with a swimming pool and spa.

**Where to book:** Inntravel (01653 629039, [Inntravel](#)). Three nights' half-board from £396.

### **Lech, Austria**

Traditional Lech is two hours from Innsbruck and one of the best places to go in Austria for a weekend. Queuing is never a problem because the resort excludes skiers from the slopes once they consider them to be full. Priority is given to those staying in the resort.

**Where to book:** White Roc (020-7792 1188, [White Roc](#)). From £460 for three days' half-board at Hotel Lech & Chesa Rosa, including car hire.

### **Verbier, Switzerland**

Flexiski organises four-night weekend breaks in eight different Alpine resorts, with Verbier the most convenient for a short break. The 400km of skiing goes up to 3,330m, so you can be sure of finding snow whenever you go.

**Where to book:** Flexiski (0870 9090754, [Flexiski](#)). From £595 for four nights' B&B at Hotel Bristol.

## **Ski courses**

### **Les Houches, France**

The British Ski Academy is a school run by an ex-World Cup racer, where pupils receive race-training in the morning and academic lessons in the afternoon. Adults can join the school's trainers for afternoon masterclasses in carving and giant-slalom.

**Where to book:** The British Ski Academy (020-8399 1181, [British Ski Academy](#)). Adult courses cost £90 for three afternoons.

### **La Thuile, Italy**

Interski has its own ski and snowboard school run by the British Association of Snowsport Instructors (BASI), catering for complete beginners as well as those who want to brush up their technique. The holidays include lift passes, insurance, meals and

après-ski.

**Where to book:** Interski (01623 456333, [Interski](#)). From £409 in an apartment for four at Résidence Planibel, including coach travel. Tuition (adult) £60 for five days, (child) £90 for six days.

### **Puy St Vincent, France**

Snowbizz Vacances race training is offered to small groups of children aged 10 to 15, who are supervised by trainers from the local Club des Sports. They are taught racing techniques, with the week culminating in a slalom competition.

**Where to book:** Snowbizz Vacances (01778 341455, [Snowbizz Vacances](#)). From £299 in a studio apartment. Race training £109 for one week.

### **Soldeu, Andorra**

The Ski Club of Great Britain runs more than 100 different courses during the winter for different standards and age groups. The Elementary Instruction Clinic takes place in Soldeu during March, for people who have already mastered the basics and want to improve their skills.

**Where to book:** Ski Club of Great Britain (0845 458 0784, [Ski Club](#)). £625 half-board, including instruction.

### **Chamonix, France**

Ski Weekend holds courses for intermediates run by BASI trainer John Pickett. The Chamonix courses are held in January and March, with groups limited to a maximum of six skiers.

**Where to book:** Ski Weekend (01367 241636, [Ski Weekend](#)). From £659 for four days' B&B, including four mornings' instruction, video analysis, insurance.

### **Beginners**

#### **La Plagne, France**

La Plagne is not one but 11 villages, with the easiest pistes to be found at Plagne Centre and Bellecôte. Oxygene Ski School operates a free daily minibus collection service from your chalet to the ski school meeting point at Plagne Centre for the start lessons.

**Where to book:** Ski Beat (01243 780405, [Ski Beat](#)). From £299 half-board.

#### **Borovets, Bulgaria**

The bustling resort in the Rila Mountains is particularly good for first-timers, and prices are lower than in many other skiing destinations. Borovets Ski School has a fine reputation for teaching beginners, who, after a few days, will be ready to progress to more challenging slopes.

**Where to book:** Neilson (0870 333 3347, [Neilson](#)). From £305 half-board.

#### **Les Contamines, France**

Instead of choosing a world-famous name with a large ski area and prices to match, beginners will feel less bewildered in a small resort with plenty of confidence-building runs. Les Contamines has more than 100km of meticulously groomed piste, and the après-ski is relaxed and friendly with moderate prices.

**Where to book:** Ski Total (0870 1633633, [Sli Total](#)). From £329 half-board.

#### **Les Arcs, France**

Les Arcs is the home of Ski Evolutif, where you start on skis as short as 100cm and progress to longer ones as your technique improves. The advantage is that you learn to ski parallel on day one, so that by day six you can become a confident intermediate.

**Where to book:** Erna Low (020-7584 2841, [Erna Low](#)). From £336 in a studio apartment, including ferry.

### **Niederau, Austria**

The enchanting little Tyrolean resort is ideal for beginners, with the nursery slopes immediately behind the village centre. For the next stage, you take the Markbachjoch chair-lift up to a choice of drag-lifts and some wide, easy runs.

**Where to book:** Crystal (0870 1606040, [Crystal](#)). From £385 half-board at Hotel Vicky.

### **Experts**

#### **Val d'Isère, France**

If you don't want to waste time getting from your accommodation to the slopes, Chalet Les Santons is in an ideal position, just a few paces from the piste. With 300km of linked piste and 96 lifts, there certainly isn't any time to waste, and Val also has some of the best lift-served off-piste in the world.

**Where to book:** VIP (020-8875 1957, [VIP](#)). From £289 half-board.

#### **Vaujany, France**

The hamlet of Vaujany shares a ski area with the much larger resort of Alpe d'Huez, providing skiing and snowboarding for all standards. A 160-person cable-car gives easy access to what is the fifth largest ski area in France. The 16km Sarenne is the longest black run in the Alps, but the off-piste offers even greater challenges.

**Where to book:** Ski Peak (01428 741144, [Ski Peak](#)). From £475 half-board at Hotel du Rissiou.

#### **Aspen, Colorado**

Aspen, with its four separate mountains, has some of the best skiing in North America, with a good choice of skiing for experts. Aspen Mountain is riddled with near vertical chutes, Highlands has some exhilarating off-piste and Snowmass has some notoriously steep chutes and glades.

**Where to book:** Ski Independence (0870 5550555, [Ski Independence](#)) From £600 B&B at the Aspen Mountain Lodge.

#### **Whistler, Canada**

Whistler is internationally acknowledged as one of the snow capitals of the world, with some truly challenging skiing. Of its two linked mountains, Blackcomb has the steepest couloirs, and adjoining Whistler Mountain has some fine off-piste powder bowls.

**Where to book:** Frontier Ski (020-8776 8709, [Frontier Ski](#)). From £789 in a two-bedroom apartment.

#### **Chamonix, France**

Anyone coming to Chamonix fresh from the pastures of Austria will be in for a shock, for this is high alpine territory and the ski extreme centre of the world. The skiing, in the lee of Mont Blanc, is a truly memorable experience for experts - steep, complex, and dramatic, with seemingly unlimited possibilities.

**Where to book:** Collineige (01276 24262, [Collineige](#)). From £845 half-board.

### **Unusual**

#### **Cross-country through Norway**

Halfway between Oslo and Bergen is the Hardangervidda plateau, a rolling landscape dotted with frozen lakes, pine trees and log cabins. A guide accompanies you along the

cross-country trails.

**Where to book:** Headwater (01606 720099). From £797 half-board at Hotel Ustedalen in Geilo, including picnic lunches and guiding.

### **Cheap heli-skiing and all-night partying**

Baqueira-Beret is a smart yet unpretentious resort in the northern Pyrenees, with a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. The resort is virtually unknown outside Spain, but eating out is good value and the heli-skiing is the cheapest in Europe. The après-ski goes on so late that most people take a siesta after skiing.

**Where to book:** Ski Miquel (01457 821200, [miquelholts.co.uk](http://miquelholts.co.uk)). From £379 half-board at Chaletotel Salana.

### **Snowcat skiing at Grand Targhee**

The main attraction of this small Wyoming resort is the snowcat skiing on 2,000 acres of virgin powder snow. The cat only takes 10 passengers at a time, so you need to book early. If you can't get a place, the resort has an additional 2,000 acres of lift-served piste. Prices in Grand Targhee are notably lower than in its famous neighbour, Jackson Hole.

**Where to book:** Lotus Supertravel (020-7962 9933, [Lotus](http://Lotus)). From £729 at the Teewinot Lodge.

### **An extraordinary place to stay**

Crans Montana is situated on a sunny plateau above the Rhône Valley. Five minutes' drive below the resort is Domaine de la Baronne, which, although classed as a chalet, is more Florentine palazzo in style.

**Where to book:** The Oxford Ski Company (07000 785349). From £12,000 (£857pp) half-board for the whole chalet for 14, not including travel.

### **The world's newest resort**

Kicking Horse in Canada ([kickinghorseresort.com](http://kickinghorseresort.com)) opens for its second season on December 14 but has already attracted a passionate following among adventurous skiers. The terrain is nearly twice the size of Breckenridge, and is set to expand further. There is currently little mountainside accommodation, so visitors stay in the valley town of Golden.

**Where to book:** Ski Safari (01273 223680, [Ski Safari](http://SkiSafari)). From £685 room-only at the Prestige Inn, including car hire.