

Chic and cheap

Five luxury ski resorts on a budget

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A [larger](#) | [smaller](#)



Heart of the Matterhorn ... Zermatt

Courchevel 1850

If Heat magazine were a resort, it could only be Courchevel 1850; even though the opening this year of designer spa hotel Le Manali in the resort's mid-village, 1650, signals a glittering new trickle-down trend, the top of the hill is still the place to be. Don't even think about Christmas or New Year, when the sky swarms with private jets flying in the favourite brands of champagne and caviar of the Russian oligarchs who stage an annual takeover. Drinking, dining and dancing should be chosen with extreme caution (Jump Bar and Le Bowling followed by pizza and DJs at Le Kalico is as close as you'll get to a cheap night out), but there are frequent street parties and free events. Ensuite doubles at the cosy B&B La Croisette (00 33 4 7908 0900, hoteldelacroisette.com) right at 1850's throbbing heart, start at a very reasonable £55 per night.

More information courchevel.com

Real deal First Choice (0871 664 9017, firstchoice.co.uk/ski) offers flights, transfers and seven nights in a catered chalet from £459.

Ischgl

Just why the UK's aspirational Alpinistas haven't yet cottoned on isn't entirely clear, but this town 100km west of Innsbruck has for decades been the number one destination for Germans seeking style and snow, and it's threatening to eclipse St Anton. Look up and it's another well-kept Tyrolean town. Keep your eyes at street level however and the designer boutiques, restaurants and bars - from grand to rustic to glitzy to tits-out - reveal Ischgl's raison d'etre: grown-up hedonism. You'd have to remortgage to check into the achingly cool Madlein, so instead book a twin room at the dead-central Haus Pfeifer; B&B starts at £57. Well-priced pizza, pasta and grillhouse joints serve heaped helpings.

More information ischgl.com

Real deal Inghams (020 8780 4433, ingham.co.uk) seven-night packages with flights

Whistler

Canada doesn't really do exclusive. Luxurious and costly, yes, but there are prices to suit everyone. Regular flights into nearby Vancouver keep returns around the £400 mark, and if you book less popular early- or late-season dates, you can choose your digs from rock-bottom basics for pocket change, or a room in a five-star hotel from £85 a night. The resort website (below) juggles a dizzying array of packages, bundles and last-minute offers, so flexibility wins big. The same is true in-resort. Whistler's tourist head count means that clubs like Tommy Africa's, Maxx Fish and Garfinkel's can sell the hottest tickets in town by drawing big-name DJs, while the freebie-seeker is also well-catered for with comedy (Buffalo Bill's), traditional Irish music (The Dubh Linn Gate) or local live bands (The Crabshack).

More information whistlerblackcomb.com

Real deal Neilson (0870 333 3356, neilson.co.uk) has seven nights' self-catering, flights and transfers from £644.

Courmayeur

While Courmayeur's ski area is fraught with limitations for all but the most adventurous off-pisters, the town's cobbled medieval steets, boutiques eateries make this getaway for Milan and Turin's cognoscenti a uniquely seductive proposition. Yes, the streets run with mink. Yes, you may be blinded by Ivana Trump-style gold lame ski-suits on the slopes. And yes, unfettered gourmandising in the top spots could put paid to the kids' university fund in a week. But this fiercely stylish resort has a democratic side too; rooms in [cute Bouton d'Or \(00 39 0165 846 729, hotelboutondor.com\)](http://cute Bouton d'Or (00 39 0165 846 729, hotelboutondor.com)) start from £76 and £60 at the olde-worlde boutique hotel Villa Novecento (+0165 843 000). Of the many brasseries which serve unpretentious pasta and meat dishes, Mont Frety (+0165 845 095) tops the charts for flavour and value. And the town's most defining feature doesn't even come with a price tag - the early evening passeggiata, when impeccable Italians work Via Roma like it's a catwalk.

More information courmayeur.com

Real deal Momentum Ski (020-7371 9111, momentum.uk.com) tailormakes itineraries to clients' budget and taste. From £314 covers seven nights' B&B, easyJet flights and car hire.

Zermatt

The terribly sensible Swiss might balk at the "look at me!" glitz of a Courchevel or Courmayeur, but that doesn't mean they're averse to a bit of high life. Their star player, Zermatt, has simpler pleasures (horse-drawn sleighs, crappy old-fashioned souvenirs and that view of the Matterhorn) but a stay here is no less decadent. Zermatt's on-slope dining may well be the world's best up a mountain, but it comes with skyscraping prices, so cosy bolt-holes like Restaurant DuPont (00 41 27 967 4343), Le Mazot (+27 966 0606) and Grampi's (+27 967 7788) down in town are lifesavers. You get a Matterhorn view from £40 for a double at the Matterhornblick (+27 967 4343, matterhornblick.ch) or the Matterhorn Hostel (+27 968 1919, matterhornhostel.com), which also does cheaper dorm beds. Come snifter time, best bets are the perma-party at Brown Cow in the Hotel Post, and the youngish, groovyish North Wall in the Hotel Rhodania. Uniquely in Switzerland, under-10s ski free, and under-17s go for half price.

More information zermatt.ch

Real deal Thomson (0870 606 1470, thomsonski.co.uk) offers flights, transfers and seven nights' self-catering from £385.

