

Is west best for skiing?

By Felice Hardy, Evening Standard

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North American resorts tend to be owned and operated by a single company. The result is a coordinated policy of keeping customers happy.

The ski areas, with a few notable exceptions, are small in comparison to Europe.

Alpine resorts have vast ski areas such as the Trois Vallées, with its 189 lifts. Restaurants are the great strength, on and off the mountain, and nowhere in North America can you find that charming family-run hostelry brimming with atmosphere.

The holiday prices listed below are per person for seven nights in low-season January unless stated. Lift passes, equipment hire and ski school are for six days unless stated. Food and drink prices are guidelines only.

1. For families

Puy-St-Vincent, France vs Big White, Canada Puy-St-Vincent PSV was extremely popular with British families in the Seventies, but later fell from favour. It is now back as a retro resort that not many people know about.

The small ski area has enough variety to suit all standards. Accommodation is in apartments conveniently set on the edge of the piste.

The holiday From £279pp self-catering, including flights and transfers. Snowbizz: 01778 348809, www.snowbizz.co.uk.

The skiing Altitude 1,400-2,750m; 16 lifts.

The extras Lift pass: £79. Equipment hire: £46. Ski school (12 hours of tuition): £65. Child-care: £150. Soft drink/small beer: £2. Burger/spag bol on the mountain: £5. Dinner for two with wine: £22.

Travel time Four hours via Turin.

Price £1,814 for a family of four.

Big White A charming resort tucked away in the beautiful Okanagan Valley, in British Columbia. The welcome is raw Canadian rather than overtly commercial, and the skiing can exceed expectations.

The extensive but predominantly intermediate area is better suited to families than radical adventurers.

The holiday From £819 room only, including flights, 4WD car hire, and six-day lift pass. Ski Safari: 01273 223680, www.ski-safari.com.

The skiing Altitude: 1,508-2,319m; 10 lifts.

The extras Lift pass: included. Equipment hire: £77. Ski school (12 hours): £80. Child-care (five days): £124. Soft drink/small beer: £1.30. Burger/spag bol: £3-£4. Dinner: £22.

Travel time 13 hours via Vancouver or Calgary.

Price £3,726 for a family of four.

2. Buzzy and popular with intermediates

Les Arcs, France vs Banff/Lake Louise, Canada

Les Arcs This purpose-built resort in the French Tarentaise has consistently embraced innovation. It has soared to greater heights with the development of a new village, Arc 1950, built, ironically, by Canadian resort developer Intrawest.

The cable-car link to La Plagne makes it one of Europe's largest ski circuits.

The holiday From £591 for two-room apartment for four people, including ferry crossings. Erna Low: 0870 750 6820, www.ernalow.co.uk.

The skiing Altitude: 1,200-3,226m; 141 lifts.



Can North America ever compete with Europe's skiing diversity?

The extras Lift pass: £159. Equipment hire: from £54. Ski school (15 hours): £105. Child-care: £126. Soft drink/small beer: £2. Burger/spag bol: £7. Dinner: £21.

Travel time 14 hours' drive from London.

Price £1,427 for two.

Banff/Lake Louise Canada's most popular destination for British skiers, largely because of the price. Set in the beautiful Banff National Park, it comprises three areas: Lake Louise, Sunshine Village and Ski Banff@Norquay.

The Holiday From £629 room only at the Banff Inn, including flights and 4WD car hire. Ski Safari: 01273 223680, www.ski-safari.com.

The skiing Altitude: 1,662-2,637m; 29 lifts.

The extras Lift pass: £172. Equipment hire: £65-£101. Ski school (24 hours): £196. Child-care: from £90. Soft drink/small beer: £2. Burger/spag bol: £4. Dinner: £26.

Travel time 11 hours via Calgary.

Price £2,239 for two.

3. Intimate and charming

Cormayeur, Italy vs Crested Butte, Colorado

Cormayeur A delightful old village with cobblestone alleys full of restaurants, bars and designer boutiques.

The main ski area is suited to intermediates, but a cable-car from the hamlet of Entrèves accesses the Vallée Blanche and other off-piste challenges.

The holiday From £385pp B&B in **the threestar Hotel Bouton d'Or**, including flights and car hire. Momentum Ski: 020 7371 9111, www.momentum.uk.com.

The skiing Altitude: 1,700-2,624m; 19 lifts.

The extras Lift pass: £135. Equipment hire: £40. Ski school (15 hours): £115. Child-care (five days): from £200. Soft drink/small beer: £2. Burger/spag bol: £5. Dinner: £56.

Travel time Three hours via Geneva.

Price £1,420 for two.

Crested Butte This small, historic mining town dates back to the 19th century and is one of the most attractive resorts in Colorado.

It is renowned for having the steepest lift-served terrain in North America, but it also has some of Colorado's easiest intermediate skiing.

The holiday From £719 at the four-star Sheraton Crested Butte Resort, including flights and transfers. Ski The American Dream: 0870 350 7547, www.skidream.com.

The skiing Altitude: 2,774-3,707m; 13 lifts.

The extras Lift pass: £138. Equipment hire: £66. Ski school (30 hours): £219. Child care: £97. Soft drink/small beer: £1.50. Burger/spag bol: £4. Dinner: £20.

Travel time 13 hours via Denver.

Price £2,386 for two.

4. Tough skiing, fizzing nightlife, pretty village

St Anton, Austria, vs Whistler, Canada

St Anton A member of that exclusive club of world-class resorts where the awesome terrain raises the adrenaline level of even the most jaded powderhound.

The village blends old and new, with a pedestrian zone of shops, cafés and traditional hotels.

The holiday From £605 half-board at threestar Hotel Rendlhof, including flights and transfers. Thomson Ski: 0870 606 1470, www.thomson-ski.co.uk.

The skiing Altitude: 1,304-2,811m; 82 lifts (St Arlberg area). **The extras** Lift pass: £115-£126. Equipment hire: £102-£133. Ski school (24 hours): £217. Child-care: £136. Soft drink/small beer: £2. Burger/spag bol: £4-£12. Dinner: £61-£68.

Travel time Four hours via Zurich.

Price £2,095 for two.

Whistler Over the past 15 years, Whistler has established a reputation as the fount of all innovation in skiing and snowboarding.

Few resorts provide such an inspiring combination of awesome terrain, comfortable accommodation and cosmopolitan atmosphere.

The holiday From £662 room only at the three-star Whistler Creek Lodge, including flights and transfers. Crystal Ski: 0870 160 6040, www.crystalski.co.uk.

The skiing Altitude: 675-2,284m; 33 lifts.

The extras Lift pass: £185. Equipment hire: £75-£110. Ski school (16 hours): £170. Child-care: £255. Burger/spag bol: £5. Soft drink/small beer: £2. Dinner: £35.

Travel time 13 hours via Vancouver.

Price £2,544 for two.

5. Great skiing, glitzy yet cosmopolitan

Val d'Isère, France, vs Aspen, Colorado

Val d'Isère The skiing in the area is so varied and demanding that its most dedicated experts never ski anywhere else.

Val's commercial heart is Val Village, a cluster of 'oldstyle' stone buildings housing smart boutiques.

The holiday From £669pp half-board at Chalet Madrisah, including flights and transfers. VIP: 08701 123 119, www.vipchalets.com.

The skiing Altitude: 1,550-3,456m; 97 lifts.

The Extras Lift pass: £131. Equipment hire: £105. Ski school (33 hours): £110. Child-care: £266. Soft drink/small beer: £2. Burger/spag bol: £7-£10. Dinner: £55.

Travel time Five hours via Geneva.

Price £1,963 for two.

Aspen This delightful town lies at the foot of Aspen Mountain and boasts 200 shops and a huge variety of restaurants.

Four mountains offer skiing and snowboarding for beginners to experts; Highlands is the mountain for going off-piste.

The holiday From £705 B&B Aspen Mountain Lodge, including flights and transfers. Ski Independence: 0870 555 0555, www.ski-i.com.

The skiing Altitude: 2,399-3,815m; 37 lifts.

The extras Lift pass: £248. Equipment hire: from £80. Ski school (30 hours): £286. Child-care: £329. Soft drink/small beer: £2. Burger/spag bol: £4-£6. Dinner: £45-£60.

Travel time 16 hours via Denver.

Price £2,752 for two.

6. Steep, deep and macho

Verbier, Switzerland, vs Jackson Hole, Wyoming

Verbier Verbier has a huge variety of challenging pistes and is home to some of Europe's most exciting off-piste skiing.

Nowhere is there a more extensive menu of glaciers, couloirs and powder bowls to tickle the palates of advanced skiers and riders.

The holiday From £644pp half-board at the four-star Hotel Vanessa, including flights and transfers. Inghams: 020 8780 4433, www.inghams.co.uk.

The skiing Altitude: 1,500-3,330m; 94 lifts.

The extras Lift pass: £139. Equipment hire: £96. Ski school (24 hours): £89. Child-care: £160 Soft drink/small beer: £2. Burger/spag bol: £7. Dinner: £33.

Travel time Three hours via Geneva.

Price £1,880 for two.

Jackson Hole A cult resort for fans of powder who ski on the steep, exciting slopes above Teton Village, a 20-minute drive from the cowboy town of Jackson.

The ultimate test of nerve is Corbet's Couloir, a leap into space off a cornice, landing on a 50-degree slope.

The holiday From £618 B&B at the Parkway Inn, including flights and transfers. Ski Independence: 0870 555 0555, www.ski-i.com.

The skiing Altitude: 1,924-3,186m; 10 lifts.

The extras Lift pass: £208. Equipment hire: £75. Ski school (18 hours): £268. Child-care: £319. Soft drink/small beer: £1.50. Burger/spag bol: £4. Dinner: £34.

Travel time 13 hours via Denver.

Price £2,926 for two.

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