

Top ten: picture postcard ski resorts

By Peter Hardy, Daily Mail

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1. Kitzbuhel, Austria

This charming town in the Tyrol is a walled, medieval settlement painted with delicate frescoes and set against the magnificent backdrop of the Wilder Kaiser mountain range.

What to do: The pedestrianised precinct within the town walls is lined with boutiques. Ride to the top of the Hahnenkamm gondola for lunch. The resort also has an excellent swimming pool complex.

Where to eat: Lunch at Hoch Kitzbuhel, Pengelstein, or the Streifalm. Dine at Hotel zur Tenne or the gourmet Rosengarten in the Hotel Taxacherhof at neighbouring Kirchberg.

Where to party: As the lifts close, *apres ski* begins in The Londoner. Try also S'Lichtl, Barrique, F_ngerl, and the Schirmbar in the Sporthotel Reisch.

Oh, and the skiing: Those who have watched the death-defying Hahnenkamm race on TV will be surprised to discover that most of the skiing is aimed at intermediates.

A new gondola which opened this month allows skiers to complete the famous Ski Safari itinerary to Pass Thurn in both directions without a bus link.

Inside edge: Stay at the three-star Garni Licht, a pleasant B&B. Momentum Ski (0207 371 9111 www.momentumski.com) from £794, dinner not included. www.kitzbuehel.com



2. Bad Gastein, Austria Bad Gastein houses a casino and a collection of once-grand hotels painted mostly in the imperial yellow of Vienna's Sch'nbrunn Palace. Johann Strauss and Franz Schubert both composed here.

What to do: Some 23 million litres of hot water bubble up each day from 17 natural springs and are piped into all the main hotels. The public indoor and outdoor pools at the Felsenbad are where you can wallow in the waters and, through a haze of steam, watch skiers in action just a few metres away.

Where to eat: Lunch at the Jungerstube or the Wengeralm. Dine at the Hofkeller and the Fischer St_berl.

Where to party: The Gatz Music Club, Central Park Entertainment, Eden's Pub, and H'gblom's.

Oh, and the skiing: 48 lifts along the valley suit all standards. The most challenging pistes are at Dorfgastein, a few minutes' drive away.

Inside edge: Stay at the four-star Hotel Wildbad. Ski Miquel (01457 821200 www.miquelhols.co.uk). From £561. www.badgastein.at

3. Cortina D'Ampezzo, Italy This smart little town in the Dolomites merits a place on the podium for World's Most Attractive Ski Resort. At sunset the craggy rock faces of Monte Cristallo turn a delicate shade of pink.

What to do: Shop, skate, bobsleigh. It's also home to the world's only Co-op with marble floors and designer clothes.

Where to eat: Lunch at scenic Lago Ghedina, a 15-minute drive from town. Dine at Tivoli, El Toula, or the tiny Leone e Anna.

Where to party: Start at the Enoteca wine bar. Move on later to the Blu Room and Bilbo's.

Oh, and the skiing: Rather ancient lifts cover the three main sectors. Little Cinque Torri is not to be missed. It has the best mountain restaurant but non skiers can't reach it.

Inside edge: Stay at the Hotel Cristallo, which houses one of Italy's top spas and sports therapy centres. Elegant Resorts (01244 897 333; www.elegantresorts.co.uk), from £1,110. www.infodolomiti.it

4. Levi, Finland Levi lies in the Arctic Circle, a two-hour drive from the Lapp capital of Rovaniemi. It is a magical-place for a winter snow holiday. From November to January the sun fails to make an appearance above the horizon and the day passes in gentle twilight. By contrast, spring days last much of the 24 hours.

What to do: 230km of crosscountry trails, reindeer and dogsledding, ice-fishing, snowmobiling, snowshoeing. You might even see the Northern Lights.

Where to eat: Ubiquitous reindeer and smoked fish form the staple diet at most restaurants, but a Chinese and an Italian trattoria open this

winter.

Where to party: Nightlife is limited to a few bars, where drinking is a serious business.

Oh, and the skiing: The 22 lifts, including a modern gondola, make it one of the largest ski areas in Scandinavia. Good snow cover is assured from November to May.

Inside edge: Four-star Hotel Levitunturi offers some of the best accommodation. Inghams(020 8780 4433; www.inghams.co.uk), from £520. www.levi.fi

5. Wengen, Switzerland Wengen, together with the neighbouring Mürren and Grindelwald, is the Edwardian birthplace of ski tourism. It is car-free.

What to do: Gaze up at the majestic peaks of the Eiger, Mönch, and Jungfrau. Take the train to Kleine Scheidegg for lunch. There are plenty of scenic walks, a fine skating rink, and a 4km toboggan-run back to the village from Wengernalp.

Where to eat: Lunch at the Hotel Jungfrau at Wengernalp or the Kleine Scheidegg station buffet. Dine at the Berghaus or the Hirschenstübli in the Hotel Hirschen.

Where to party: The Tanne, Sina's Pub, Hot Chilli, and Rocks Bar are all popular watering holes.

Oh, and the skiing: Wengen shares the Kleine Scheidegg ski area with Grindelwald. The lift pass includes Mürren, giving access to mainly intermediate slopes. Wengen has good nursery slopes in the village centre.

Inside edge: Stay at the pleasant three-star Hotel Belvedere, Thomson (0870 606 1470; www.thomsonski.co.uk), from £485. www.wengenmuerren.ch

6. Courmayeur, Italy The heart of the old village below the Italian entrance to the Mont Blanc Tunnel is a maze of cobbled alleyways. It is largely traffic-free and lined with fashion boutiques, delicatessens and antique shops.

What to do: Scenic cross-country skiing at Val Ferret. Take the cable car to Plan Châcrouit for lunch. Practice your golf on snow at the driving range at the first stage of the Mont Blanc cable car.

Where to eat: Lunch up the mountain at Rifugio Maison Vieille or the Christiania. Dine at Pierre Alexis or Cadran Solaire.

Where to party: The bars in the pedestrianised Via Roma come to life when the lifts close. Try Bar Posta, Bar Roma, and the American Bar.

Oh, and the skiing: 19 lifts serving 100km of mainly intermediate skiing. An ancient three-stage cable car takes experienced offpiste skiers up the Italian side of Mont Blanc and provides access to the Vallée Blanche.

Inside edge: Stay at the family-run Hotel Bouton d'Or, or at the stylish Auberge de la Maison in the adjoining hamlet of Entrèves. Momentum Ski (020 7371 9111 www.momentumski.com), from £485 B&B. www.comune.courmayeur.ao.it

7. Saas Fee, Switzerland This is a delightfully unspoilt resort set against one of the most dramatic glacial backdrops. Its narrow streets are lined with modern hotels interspersed with ancient barns and chalets.

What to do: Take a trip up the world's highest underground funicular, the Metro Alpin. Visit the ice museum inside a crevasse. **Where to eat:** Lunch at the Plattjen or the Gleschergrotte. Dine at the C'sar Ritz in the Fletschhorn Waldhotel, the Cheminée, or the Hofsaal in the Hotel Schweizerhof.

Where to party: The Crazy Night, Nesti's Ski Bar, and Popcorn in the Hotel Dom all have plenty of action. **Oh, and the skiing:** With the top lift at 3,600m, snow cover is virtually guaranteed throughout the year. The 22 lifts serve 100km of runs. The nursery slopes are brilliant.

Inside edge: Stay at the four-star Alkaline Hotel. Ski Independence (0870 555 0555; www.ski-i.com) from £656. www.saas-fee.ch

8. St-Martin-De-Belleville, France This ancient cheese-making village in the Trois Vallées is an attractive contrast to Val Thorens and Les Menuires, its purpose-built neighbours. You can still buy fresh milk and cheese from the farmhouse door.

What to do: Go for long walks and absorb the rural atmosphere. Val Thorens has indoor tennis and an ice-driving circuit.

Where to eat: Lunch at Le Corbeley or L'Etoile de Neige. Dine at La Montagnarde.

Where to party: This is not the place for a raucous nightlife, but a couple of village bars provide some entertainment. **Oh, and the skiing:** The Belleville Valley has some of the best open skiing in the Trois Vallées. The resort has been transformed by a gondola which now provides main mountain access.

Inside edge: Stay at La Bouitte in the neighbouring hamlet of St-Marcel. This is a famous restaurant which has become a boutique hotel with five heavily-beamed suites in an old Savoyard farmhouse. (Kaluma Ski (0870 442 8044; www.kalumatravel.co.uk), from £700 B&B. www.st-martin-debelleville.com

9. Alpbach, Austria Alpbach is an attractive, traditional village on a steep hillside in the heart of the Tyrol. It dates back to the tenth century. In recent years, new buildings have been kept to such an absolute minimum that only Alta in Utah can match it for retro-chic.

What to do: Go for long walks, toboggan, take sleigh rides. Ride the gondola.

Where to eat: Lunch at the Hornboden. Dine at the Hotel Post, Gasthof Wiedersbergerhorn, the Rossmoos, or the Jakober.

Where to party: Try the Messnerwirt, Postalm, and the Waschkuchl.

Oh, and the skiing: The lift map does not do justice to this area which has a surprisingly large variation in terrain suitable for everyone. **Inside edge:** Stay at the four-star Alpbacherhof, Inghams (020 8780 4433; www.inghams.co.uk), from £433. www.alpbach.at

10. Telluride, Colorado, USA Butch Cassidy brought fame to this old mining town in Colorado when he robbed his first bank here in 1889. During the gold rush it was home to 5,000 prospectors. The speed limit is 10mph and cars give way to pedestrians.

What to do: Browse the shops and explore the historic buildings, ride the gondola to the modern mountain village, indulge in spa treatments at Peaks Resort.

Where to eat: Lunch at Alfred's, Guiseppe's, or Big Billie's. Dine at Limeleaf or Rustico.

Where to party: The bar of the New Sheridan Hotel61.

Oh, and the skiing: 18 lifts serving 1,700 acres of terrain for all standards. Galloping Goose area is for beginners, while steep off-piste glades like Spiral Stairs will test experts.

Inside edge: Stay at the Ice House in the Old Town. Ski Independence (0870 555 0555; www.ski-i.com), from £889, meals not included.

Prices listed are per person for seven nights in January. They include flights, transfers, and half-board accommodation unless otherwise stated, based on two people sharing.

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