

# WHERE *to* SKI AND Snowboard 2007

## ANOTHER BUMPER SNOW SEASON

Last year we published a comprehensive review of snowfall patterns. This year we have asked the author, Fraser Wilkin, to bring us up to date on last season. Here is his report.

The 2005–2006 season was average or better-than-average for the Alps, despite the slow start in many resorts that has become typical in recent years. Early season in the Tarentaise resorts of France was grim, with early-season favourites such as Val-d'Isère relying on artificial help to lay their base (not very effectively, judging by our Christmas visit). But in the end resorts here fared well – Tignes received 618cm of snow over the season compared with a long-term average of 605cm. Arc 2000 had 640cm of snow compared with just 340cm the previous season and an average of 690cm. La Rosière received 676cm compared with an average of 614cm. Much of this, however, was due to bumper March snowfalls. This has been the pattern of several recent seasons. The moral? Take a holiday in March or April rather than in December or early January.

The exceptions to lack of early snow were Austria and the northern fringes of the Swiss and French Alps, where resorts as diverse as Lech, Engelberg and Avoriaz had good snow from the start.

Rain and snow affected many regions over the New Year holiday, before cold and settled conditions established themselves over the Alps for the first half of January. This left southern resorts fearing a repeat of the 2004–2005 snow drought. Conditions were much better further north and east, with most of Austria remaining in good shape. The weather became more unsettled later in January, bringing yet more fresh snow to Austria, and then to other areas including the southern resorts of Serre-Chevalier and Sestriere.

After a quiet start to February, powerful Atlantic storms (a rarity in recent seasons) swept heavy snow across the Alps, with some rain at lower levels. Colder weather returned later in the month with further snow for the Southern Alps. March was very unsettled, and a series of potent storms saw huge snowfalls across the northern French Alps (Chamonix, Val-d'Isère) and western and central Switzerland (Crans-Montana, Verbier). This



time the east and south missed the heaviest snowfalls, but there remained excellent cover across the Alps despite a dramatic increase in temperature at the end of the month. These unsettled conditions continued into April, when the northern Alps saw further heavy snow at altitude. The weather settled down later in the month, with some great spring skiing on upper slopes. Overall, snowfall during the season was most consistent in Austria.

Rarely has North America seen such a successful season across such a wide area. After an indifferent start, most of California had an outstanding season. The pattern in Utah was not dissimilar, although it enjoyed a stronger early season. Much of Colorado got off to an excellent start, with most resorts fully operational by Christmas. The only problems were in the southern Rockies (eg Taos, which received less than 60% of its long-term average) and parts of the east (eg Killington, which received only 77% of average). Just about everywhere else enjoyed above-average snowfall, including most of western Canada, which suffered so badly in the previous season. For example, Mammoth in California got 178% of its long-term average snowfall, Jackson Hole in Wyoming 122%, Alta in Utah 120%, Vail in Colorado 112%. In Canada, Sunshine Village near Banff got 122% of its average yearly snowfall and Whistler near Vancouver 116%.