

Escape Travel | Culture | Adventure

LAST year's stuttering start to the season, when some western Alpine resorts were unable to open until after Christmas, means demand for peak dates in the most snow-sure resorts is higher than ever. Here are some suggestions to get you started, whenever you want to travel.

Christmas

Christmas remains the least fought-over and best value of the main school holiday weeks, partly reflecting concerns over early-season snow conditions.

A repeat of last year's snow drought is unlikely but it still pays to aim high. La Rosière, in France, offers good altitude and good value in a low-key, family-friendly atmosphere.

Childcare specialists Esprit Ski offer seven nights at Chalet Schatzi for £2,999 for a family of four, including flights, transfers and chalet board.
Tel: 01483 345 609. espritski.com

New Year

Families don't hit the slopes at New Year in quite the same numbers as they do during February half-term but prices are still sky-high in many resorts. At this time of year it would be hard to argue against Tignes, as snow-sure as anywhere in the Alps but with an excellent selection of reasonably priced accommodation.

Crystal Ski has availability for seven nights and on-site childcare at Hotel Diva, Tignes, from £3,616 for a family of four, including flights, transfers and half board.
Tel: 020 8939 0726. crystalski.co.uk

February half term

This has always been the most popular time to take the family skiing, despite the inevitable crowds and inflated prices. Reliable snow is the big draw – by mid-February even the lowest resorts are all but guaranteed decent cover and afternoon slush is less of an issue than it would be at Easter. To avoid the crush, why not give La Thuile a try? It's a great value Italian resort with a surprisingly varied ski area (linked to La Rosière in France) and a reputation for minimal queues and crowds.

Iglu Ski offers seven nights in the ultra-convenient Planibel apartments from £3,216 for a family of four, including flights and transfers.
Tel: 020 8542 6658. igluski.com

Easter

For many families, skiing at Easter makes perfect sense. Not only is it cheaper and less crowded than either February half-term or New Year, there is also nearly always plenty of snow – at least if you apply a bit of common sense to your resort selection. Easter is early this year, which helps, but demand is higher too, so waiting for a bargain is risky. If it's an absolute snow guarantee you're after, try Austria's Hintertux, the only resort in the Alps to guarantee action 365 days a year thanks to its extensive glacier.

Snow-wise offers seven nights in the three-star 'superior' Hotel Hintertuxerhof from £3,395 for a family of four, including flights, private transfers, half board and all-day childcare.
Tel: 020 3397 8450. snow-wise.com

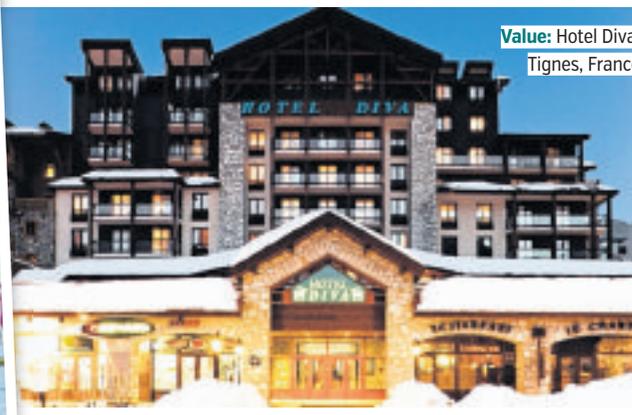


Thinking of taking the family skiing? Don't leave it too late to book, says **Fraser Wilkin**

Time to ski? Let's see...



Family friendly: Chalet Schatzi, La Rosière, France



Value: Hotel Diva, Tignes, France



Tranquil: The Planibel apartments in La Thuile, Italy



Snow guarantee: Hotel Hintertuxerhof, Austria