

Ski holidays

Late is great as long as you pick one of these snow-sure resorts

Whether it's a last-minute family getaway or a long, sun-drenched weekend at Easter, make the most of the final weeks of the ski season in these dependable destinations, says Sophie Butler

Spring may be about new beginnings, but for skiers it's the beginning of the end. By late April, most Alpine resorts have closed or are about to close, hotels and restaurants are emptying and the seasoners are starting to pack their bags for home. But that doesn't mean there's no fun to be had in the last weeks of the season – get lucky and the combination of glorious snow and bright spring sunshine can create the best conditions of the winter. And, while nothing is guaranteed in the mountains, the recent record of good end-of-season conditions can't help but bode well.

This year, Easter Sunday is late. It falls on April 20, which poses a challenge for families who are locked into travelling during the school holidays. Some schools finish on March 28, allowing for a slightly earlier getaway, but most start the Easter break on April 5. All the more important, therefore, to head to a high resort to reduce the risk of finding slushy snow and closed pistes on arrival.

If you aren't confined to school holidays, however, this timing provides a golden opportunity. Sitting snugly between the busy peak months, March is a magical moment when prices dip, lift queues shrink, pistes clear and restaurants have tables to spare. And a late Easter school break gives even greater scope for getting your mountain fix before the holidays arrive.

Resorts are also eager to entice visitors in spring, often reducing lift-passe prices for the final weeks of the season. Val d'Isère, for example, offers 40 per cent off lift tickets, lessons and equipment as part of an end-of-season special if you book a stay through the



tourist office for four nights or more, from April 18.

Les Arcs, France

Best for budget self-catering
Closing date: April 26

With plenty of runs at an altitude of more than 2,000 metres, and purpose-built, mostly ski-in/ski-out self-catering accommodation, Les Arcs' ski area is best suited to families and groups of friends looking for a low-cost break. It links into the large Fuauzlaak area, which includes La Plagne, until April 18 and has pistes to please all abilities.

Unless otherwise stated, prices are per person, based on two sharing, including flights from London and transfers, and are subject to availability.

Le Village, with ski-to-lift access, from £408, self-catering, based on four sharing a one-bedroom apartment, including return Flexibus LeShuttle crossing. Departs March 29.

Val d'Isère, France

Best for confident intermediates and experts
Closing date: May 4

Val's season extends into early May thanks to its lofty altitude, which rises to around 3,400 metres on the Pisailas glacier, combined with efficient snowmaking at lower levels. Linked to the neighbouring resort of Tignes, also a snow-sure option, it offers plenty of scope for advanced skiers and snowboarders. The resort offers dedicated ski touring passes (€36 for three lift journeys) for those keen to enjoy the spring off-piste in the Vanoise National Park.

Cervinia, Italy

Best for spring sunshine
Closing date: May 4

With slopes at 3,480 metres, Cervinia is one Italy's highest resorts with a long season morphing into glacier skiing through the summer months (beginning, conditions permitting, on May 5). Its southerly aspect means that its long crisscrossing pistes and mountain terraces are bathed in spring sunshine on clear, long, late-season days.

Myrkdalen, Norway

Best for on- and off-piste activities
Closing date: April 27

This is one of Norway's snowiest resorts, a two-hour drive from Bergen, and towards the end of the season you can expect around 17 hours of daylight in Myrkdalen. It's a compact resort and best suited to beginners, but there's also some challenging off-piste runs, plus other activities including sledging, snowshoeing, sleigh rides and cross-country.



Sölden, Austria

Best for a quick airport transfer
Closing date: May 4

With two glaciers and a top-notch snowmaking system, this Tyrolean resort is a great bet for snow-sure skiing throughout April. Within an easy 90-minute drive of Innsbruck airport, it also offers a variety of toboggan runs to test out as well as a lively après-ski scene.



Livigno, Italy

Best for terrain parks
Closing date: May 1

Close to the Swiss border, this high and remote resort has a long season that stretches into early May. And while its ski area isn't massive, it has an excellent terrain park which is set to host



Ischgl, Austria

Best for solo-hungry intermediates
Closing date: May 4

The resort's highest peak, Grottojatz, has a top lift station at around 2,870 metres and a state-of-the-art snowmaking system, making it a good destination for a late-season break. The large ski

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Peak Retreats (023 9283 0310; peakretreats.co.uk) offers self-drive stays at Les Chalets du Jardin Alpin, with sauna and steam room, from £873, self-catering, based on four sharing a two-bedroom apartment, including return Eurotunnel LeShuttle crossing. Departs April 5.

A guide to spring skiing

Is it safe to go off-piste?

Spring is traditionally when the snowpack is at its most stable. As the weather gets warmer, snow melts during the day then freezes overnight to create a solid base that is less likely to avalanche. This, plus the longer sunny days, means late-season is popular with ski tourers, who head away from the lifts in search of perfectly preserved snow – though it is always advisable to explore with a mountain guide.

Is it a good time for families?

The Easter break is often more appealing for families than February half term: the weather is warmer and the prices far lower. The longer days also allow more time to enjoy additional pursuits such as sledging, ice skating, husky rides and even cycling – resorts are brimming with activity come spring.

What kit do I need?

With sunny skies more likely than blizzards, there is a chance to ditch the extra layers and plan a week of sunning yourself on a high-altitude terrace. A good pair of snow boots will help you enjoy extended après-hours or off-slope activities. Stock up on sun cream and sunglasses or goggles with lenses that filter out all of the harmful UV rays on and off the slopes.



area, which straddles the Swiss border, offers plenty of scope for energetic intermediates wanting to catch plenty of groomed. Its end-of-season concert is legendary: this year it's headlined by OneRepublic on May 3.

Crystal Ski (020 345 1282; crystalst.co.uk) offers stays at the four-star Hotel Garni Neer, with a sauna and steam rooms near the resort centre and close to the ski lifts, from £1,262, B&B. Departs April 5.

St Moritz, Switzerland

Best for gifts and glamour
Closing date: May 4

With a tempting combination of reliable late-season snow and a sunny aspect, this super-smart resort in the Engadine Valley extends up to 3,305 metres. The town is home to classy spa hotels and spectacular views of the Pia Bernina peak.

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Snow train: the Fläm Railway transports skiers to Norway's Mythen resort

Charm offensive: Alpine villages are not short on character



Club Med (00453 678787; clubmed.co.uk) offers Val Thorens Sensations, with two restaurants and hotel clubs, from £3,711, all-inclusive, including group lessons, based on a suite. Departs April 12.

Val Thorens, France

Best for a vast ski area
Closing date: May 4

As Europe's highest resort at 2,300