

Missed out on a half-term ski trip? Sunny slopes, quieter mountains and decent snow mean that April could be a great bet, says *Sean Newsom*

Is it too late to book a ski trip this winter? This is a question that troubles many parents in mid-February. Half-term is here and a tidal wave of British families has just been unleashed across Europe's slopes. But with spring just around the corner, following in their wake seems a fool's errand.

It's not, though. Family skiing in the Easter holidays can be a blast – not least because so many people have their doubts about the snow. The slopes are quieter, ski school classes less heavily booked and prices lower than in half-term. What's more, when the sun's out it feels as though you can very nearly reach out and touch the summer that lies ahead. To be up in the mountains, full of hope as the new season comes into view, is a blissful experience.

But there are two key caveats. First, even though it has been a cold winter so

far, you need to play it safe and pick a snowsure resort. In the Alps that means one with plenty of skiing on north-facing slopes, with as many pistes as possible between 2,300m and 3,000m. Second, you need to adapt your skiing plans to suit the ever-changing condition of the cover. Usually that means starting low, 20 to 30 minutes after the sun

has kissed the first slopes, and finishing high, facing north, before 2pm. Follow with a long, late picnic or lunch on a restaurant terrace, soaking up the stupendous views before a final run back to base.

Sound like fun? If the answer is "yes please" here are seven reliable resorts in which to try it out.



WOJCIECH GAJDA/GETTY IMAGES



(Per person prices are based on a family of four travelling together)

BOOST YOUR CONFIDENCE IN VAL THORENS, FRANCE

The Cime Caron cable car may be out of action this season, but the lift system in Val Tho's north-facing mountain bowl breaks the 3,000m mark in four places. What's more, alongside its confidence-boosting beginner and intermediate-friendly pistes, it offers two breathtaking zip wires (one of which is open to children older than seven) as well as an indoor pool and 6km toboggan run – so your kids will be busy on and off the snow. Stay at the Village Montana apartments on the Rue du Soleil and you'll be a short walk from the ski school meeting points.

Details Seven nights' self-catering from £1,048pp, including flights, departing on April 5 (crystalski.co.uk)

FEEL ON TOP OF THE WORLD IN CERVINIA, ITALY

Cervinia can be tough going in a blizzard. But if you like your

pistes long, rolling and magnificent, holidaying here is well worth risking the occasional white-out. For the ultimate spring convenience, stay at the unfussy Petit Palais hotel – near the lifts up to mid-mountain Plan Maison. That way you can rise quickly over the lower slopes and get stuck into the softer, colder high-altitude snow: from 2,500m all the way to a lung-bursting 3,900m, just across the border in Switzerland.

Details Seven nights' B&B from April 6 from £1,162pp, including flights (heidi.com)

“Tignes has plenty of powder skiing and a good mix of slopes”

EMBRACE THE ALL-ROUNDER IN TIGNES, FRANCE

Of all Europe's late-season resorts, Tignes is probably the most well rounded, with a good mix of slopes above 2,100m, a glacier that tops out at 3,456m and plenty of powder skiing challenges for the experts if an Easter blizzard blows in. After an overnight frost, skiing its broad, east-facing pistes in the sun is an intense,



From far left: the French resort of Tignes; on the piste; après-ski in Val Thorens

velvety pleasure. Accommodation varies from self-catering apartments all the way to a glittering Club Med, or there's a Mark Warner chalet-hotel too – complete with platoons of British kids for your brood to bond with.

Details Seven nights' chalet board from £1,358pp, including flights, departing on April 6 (markwarner.co.uk)

GET COSY IN GURGL, AUSTRIA

Gurgl offers a rare combination of high-altitude skiing (up to 3,000m) and a sense of old-fashioned *Gemütlichkeit* cosiness. If quick access to the highest slopes is the priority, stay in the higher village of Hochgurgl. But for maximum comfort – as well as indoor and outdoor pools and a slick, on-site ski rental centre – the Edelweiss & Gurgl hotel is a canny option. It's also next to the ski-school meeting point. Group lessons in Obergurgl are pricey but

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Travel Ski season

→ Continued from page 9 include morning and afternoon sessions (five days costs £290, skischule-obergurgl.com). **Details** Seven nights' half-board from £2,222pp, departing on April 12 (ingham.co.uk). Fly to Innsbruck

SKI FREESTYLE IN LES DEUX ALPES, FRANCE

All hail the new Jandri 3S ski lift. Opened last month, it has more than halved journey times to the

snowsure glacier to just 17 minutes. What's more, if they break the journey mid-mountain, Easter skiers can let rip on the north-facing Toura sector, which reaches up to 2,600m and includes a highly rated snowpark – so Les Deux Alpes is a canny resort if you have wannabe acrobats in your brood (provided that your travel insurance covers freestyle skiing). Meanwhile, down in the resort, Hotel L'Orée des Pistes is next to the 3S lift station.

A ski school in Geilo, Norway; below right, a Val Cenis chairlift



Details Seven nights' half-board from £1,275pp, including flights, departing on April 6 (igluski.com)

GIVE WINTER SPORTS A GO IN GEILO, NORWAY

The resorts in Norway are lower than those in the Alps and in April the days are longer. So Geilo's north-facing sector of pistes – on the slopes of Kikuttoppen and Bjodnahovda – are a boon at Easter. For the most part the runs are short, broad and gentle here, but skiing is only part of the fun. Other snowy activities include dog-sledding, tobogganing, fatbiking, kicksledding and close encounters with Arctic foxes at the Langedrag Nature Park. Staying in a family suite at the Vestlia Hotel, which has an indoor play area and pool, puts you next to the ski lifts.

Details Seven nights' half-board from £1,165pp, including flights, departing on April 13 (skisafari.com)

RESORT-HOP IN VAL CENIS, FRANCE

“Brrr: Val Cenis is too cold,” an instructor from a rival ski resort told me recently, on account of its many shaded slopes. But that’s a priceless asset in spring, and it has made this remote resort a reliable late-season destination, despite a middling altitude (the slopes drop from 2,800m all the way down to 1,300m). It is also an ideal spot for a self-drive, self-catering trip. That way you can use your car to access Bonneval-sur-Arc’s pocket-sized area next door; it too is north-facing, and tops out at 3,000m. Stay in Chalet de Flambeau apartments near the ski school meeting point in Val Cenis. They share an indoor pool.

Details Seven nights' self-catering from £337pp, including Eurotunnel crossing, departing on April 5 (peakretreats.co.uk)

Savvy booking for next season

Bargain-hunters should bear in mind that Action Outdoors' family ski weeks for the 2025-2026 winter season will be on sale in spring. Run during school-holiday weeks, they are based in the sport-for-all UCPA centres in the French resorts of Flaine, Les Contamines, La Plagne, Valloire, Serre Chevalier and Les Deux Alpes. Childcare, ski hire, ski lessons, lift pass and full-board accommodation are included; prices for this winter started at £614pp. Think friendly, well-equipped youth hostels full of delighted parents who can still afford to ski and you've got the picture. But get ready for a bunfight for the most popular spots – they can sell out in a matter of minutes. Sign up for the newsletter at action-outdoors.co.uk for advanced notice of next winter's release dates, which are likely to be in April or May.

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