

PISTES DE RÉSISTANCE

Pristine powder, brilliant blue skies and out-of-this-world accommodation; these ski destinations – from France to Japan – are guaranteed to give you a lift



AUSTRIA *Chalet N, Oberlech*

If there were a Winter Olympic equivalent to Oberlech's Chalet N, it would be the mixed ice dancing, where glitz and glamour meet great performance. This Austrian hideaway (if you can call a palatial five-storey, nine-suite set-up a hideaway) is full of extravagant touches.

The rugs glisten; that's the Swarovski crystals, naturally. There's also a pillow menu, and bedding can even be embroidered with guests' initials. A staff of 35 is on hand to cater for your every whim, and a private lift takes you from heated boot room to the slopes, adding a whole new meaning to ski in, ski out. This is, however, not just sparkle for sparkle's sake (even if it does all feel a little James Bond); every detail of Chalet N has been created to make guests feel utterly pampered (or, if desired, like a secret agent).

Sleeping up to 22 in 10 suites (each with a living room, dressing room, and private balcony), the retreat is made out of reclaimed local oak. Moreover, interior designer Sebastian Zenker has balanced opulence with comfort, so although Chalet N is undoubtedly grand (six stars of grandness, in fact), it's also homely.

Oberlech, at 1,660m in the Arlberg Massif just above Lech, is a two-and-a-half-hour transfer from Zurich (and just 90 minutes from Innsbruck). With 85 lifts and 260km of pistes, the Arlberg is a vast ski area. But, if the allure of first tracks and powder carving doesn't appeal, there's plenty in the chalet to occupy you.

Spanning an entire floor, the spa – complete with adjacent Miha Bodytech gym – includes a pool with underwater speakers, a sauna and a salt-cave steam bath. Then there's arguably the

most Instagrammable luxury: two Jacuzzis on the outside deck with vistas of the valley.

This being Austria, there's a sharp focus on après ski; this being Chalet N, it happens to be on your own private terrace. Bespoke cocktails appear as if out of thin air. The sommelier hosts tastings in the wine cellar. And culinary cravings are sated by former Nobu chef Christoph Stiglitz, adding a touch of the experimental to local produce – cauliflower with dark chocolate anyone? Then there's the option of reclining (or in some cases collapsing) in the home cinema. Now that's surely enough to earn Chalet N top spot on the podium.

By Hayley Young

From €210,000 per week including meals, drinks, ski passes, equipment, transfers and a welcome massage; chalet-n.com



JAPAN *Niseko*

When Niseko residents complain about a lack of snow, what they actually mean is that none fell last night. During peak season, snowfalls of between 10 and 20cm of light, dry Siberian powder are the daily norm. This, Japan's most cosmopolitan ski resort – on the northern island of Hokkaido – has become world famous for its deep and reliable snow, and duly attracts those who have long since ticked off Verbier, Jackson Hole and Whistler.

All the action centres on Mount Niseko Annupuri, a volcanic peak with a cluster of resorts at its base. The main four – Grand Hirafu, Niseko Village, Annupuri and Hanazono – are connected by gondolas and chairlifts linking snow parks, mogul fields, ungroomed slopes, tree skiing and deserted night-skiing pistes. Marked trails cover a modest 55km, but the off-piste potential is vast – a short hike to the 1,308m peak opens up a huge expanse of virgin snow. Sunny days reveal Niseko's other draw: the snow-capped cone of Mount Yotei. Resort rooms that look out onto it command a premium; it's that special.

That panorama comes as standard at Seshu, a high-spec designer chalet in Hirafu. Not far from a raft of lifts, it sleeps 10 in five large en-suite rooms and has a media room, underfloor

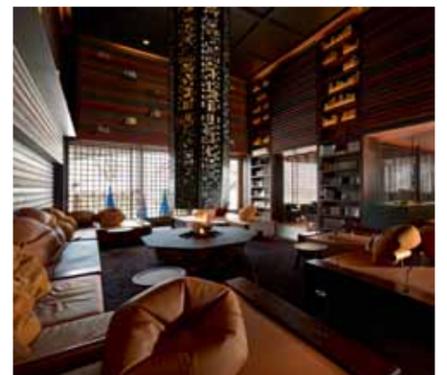
heating, Jacuzzi and floor-to-ceiling windows (for those views). Also on hand are a driver and private chefs. Managed by Niseko Boutiques, Seshu offers a personalised service and privacy not easily matched by local hotels.

Niseko's world-class restaurants are another pull. The established name is Yuichi Kamimura, whose eponymous fine-dining restaurant is in Hirafu; the rising star is Shinichi Maeda of An Dining at the Ki Niseko hotel. Both chefs showcase the seafood and dairy produce for which Hokkaido is known.

Throughout the resort, from hotels to ski schools, staff speak English. It can make Niseko feel distinctly un-Japanese, but there is tradition here. Capturing the spirit of *omotenashi* (Japanese hospitality), Moku no sho is a sophisticated Japanese *ryokan*, or inn, 15 minutes' drive from the slopes at Annupuri. It offers exquisite multi-course dinners in tatami-matted rooms, an outdoor hot-spring bath, and rare Japanese whiskies. Significantly, many of the artworks come from Hokkaido's indigenous Ainu, a people rarely heard about in modern-day Japan; like so much in Niseko, it's Japan – but not as we know it.

By Kate Crockett

nisekotourism.com ▶



THIS PAGE, FROM TOP Admiring the pristine snow at Niseko; Seshu chalet; the Moku no sho inn; OPPOSITE PAGE Chalet N in Oberlech, Austria



USA *The Little Nell, Aspen, Colorado*

A top-notch ski area since 1946, Aspen is an oldie but a goodie. In fact, with its extensive trails, culture, shopping, fine dining and 300-plus days of sunshine each year, this historic silver-mining town in the heart of the Rockies, just west of the Continental Divide, is considered North America's best ski resort.

Despite its sunny nature, Aspen has an exceptional snow record, and its altitude (the town is at 2,400m) means an abundance of dry, fluffy powder. With four distinct areas offering wide, beautifully groomed runs cut between firs and silvery aspen trees, there's plenty for skiers of all levels.

Above the town is Aspen Mountain, while the steeper Aspen Highlands – with its challenging bowl – is 10 minutes away by car and just south of the beginner ski

fields, Buttermilk. The more family-oriented Snowmass is a 25-minute drive away. In all, the resort has 513km of uncrowded pistes, with 42 lifts – it's rare that there's a queue.

Aspen is high and the effects of altitude on the body mean visitors are advised to get sufficient rest. And where better to relax than The Little Nell, the only five-star accommodation with ski-in, ski-out access to Aspen Mountain? Set at the mountain's base, the ski lodge has 78 guest rooms and 14 suites, many with mountainside views.

Perfectly located for the slopes, it offers an extensive programme for skiing guests, including exclusive access to Aspen Mountain before the gondola opens, a ski concierge service and complimentary transfers to the other ski areas. It also features an outdoor pool

and Jacuzzi, fitness centre and spa, as well as four bars and two restaurants: Element 47 delivers seasonally inspired organic fare, while the Ajax Tavern, near the gondola, is a sure bet for lunch (the truffle fries are sensational).

Dining is another thing that sets Aspen apart; highlights include the wholefood-focused Pyramid Bistro; Meat & Cheese, serving locally sourced "world farmhouse" cuisine and authentic Korean dishes; and renowned Nobu restaurant Matsuhisa.

The vibe throughout Aspen is relaxed; its inhabitants might be glamorous types, but they're friendly, down-to-earth and – like the town itself – pretty much picture perfect.

By Abigail Butcher

Town Side room from \$725 per room per night; thelittlenell.com

SOUTH KOREA *YongPyong*

It's a striking juxtaposition – vast wilderness meets purpose-built ski resort with everything from entertainment arcades to a water park. But then, until 2011 – when South Korea won the bid to host the 2018 Winter Olympic Games – it was unknown to most people that this was a country where you could ski.

In fact, there are 17 resorts. Most cater for the domestic market, with just a handful of ski lifts and few accommodation options. But for international visitors, there's YongPyong, the country's largest resort, with 15 lifts and 31 slopes. Advertising boards flank the runs and music – a medley of classical symphonies – sings out from speakers. The on-piste action doesn't, however, finish when the sun dips behind the peaks of the Taebaek Mountains. In South Korea, skiing is enjoyed as much under moonlight (well, powerful floodlights) as in bright sunlight.

Then there's the après-ski vibe – for novelty value it can't be beaten. Underground at the resort's maze of bars and arcades, the bowling, billiards and karaoke carry on until the small hours. So, too, does the drinking, with pre-karaoke confidence boosted by free-flowing Cass beer, slogged down with countless small glasses of *soju* (similar to saké).

Providing an escape from the melee is the Dragon Valley Hotel, the resort's best accommodation option. It offers both *ondol* rooms (a traditional style with underfloor heating) and spacious Western ones. There's also a sauna, a pool with views of the mountains, and fine dining at two restaurants.

A 10-minute drive away is South Korea's main Olympic venue, Alpensia. Despite the small number of ski lifts, there are new hotels and restaurants springing up every year. The 238-room InterContinental Alpensia Pyeongchang Resort has all the hallmarks of its siblings, with expansive lounges and two restaurants, as well as a cocktail bar where the mixologist will guide you through your drink's ingredients as he prepares it at your table.

While South Korea can't match Japan for fresh powder, it more than makes up for it with its wonderful quirkiness. You'll combine a ski trip with a novel cultural experience. But hurry – you need to beat those Olympics.

By Ben Clatworthy

Ski Safari offers an eight-night trip to YongPyong and Seoul including flights from £1,230 per person, based on two sharing; skisafari.com. For more information, visit gokorea.co.uk



THIS PAGE, FROM TOP YongPyong resort; Dragon Valley Hotel; Alpensia resort in Pyeongchang; OPPOSITE PAGE The Little Nell in Aspen, Colorado

Ski lift gokorea.co.uk; *Alpensia* InterContinental Alpensia



SWITZERLAND *The Chedi Andermatt, Andermatt*

To step off the train in Andermatt in Switzerland's Urseren Valley is to leap back in time. Traditional houses with tiny wooden shingles crowd the narrow streets. Farmers head for the Sternum for beer and cards. The petrol station where, in 1964, Sean Connery's James Bond made a pit-stop in *Goldfinger* hints at contemporary values that never arrived. But that all changed in 2014 when The Chedi Andermatt opened its giant doors.

The first high-altitude venture by the Singapore-based GMH Group (most of whose hotels are on palm-fringed lagoons), The Chedi Andermatt occupies a former Swiss Army barracks. When the conscripts moved out, the bulldozers moved in; now, the village has a wood and glass palace as its centrepiece. Architect Jean-Michel Gathy underpinned

a vision of Alpine zen with innovative comfort. Which other hotel includes a pool with a viewing bar, so swimmers can tackle the invigorating water while their friends look on, sipping a cocktail? Where else can you stroll into a dedicated cellar and plunder great wheels of cheese? And in each of the hotel's 101 rooms and suites (in four interconnecting buildings), a pre-programmed iPad gives you instant control of your environment; one tap and blinds unroll, phones charge and the fireplace sparks into life.

On The Chedi's extensive menu, Swiss and European dishes meet Far Eastern cuisine. The hotel offers 7,000 wines; The Cigar Lounge seats 12 around a roaring fire and incorporates a walk-in humidor; and the spa includes a Tibetan relaxation room with

virtual Himalayan views that change every 20 seconds lest Alpine reality should disappoint.

Outside the hotel is some of the Alps' most under-used, high-quality ski terrain. The venerable cable car up the Gemsstock accesses two superb black runs and one red, with adrenaline adventure to be found at the back of the mountain. Nearby Nätschen has nursery slopes and a network of blues, while the ski pass also covers user-friendly Realp and Hospental – where Russia's General Alexander Suvorov stayed during his unsuccessful Alpine campaign against the French Revolutionary army in 1799. If he'd been able to overnight in The Chedi, he'd probably have won.

By Minty Clinch

Deluxe Rooms from CHF525 per night;
ghmhotels.com/en/andermatt



FRANCE *Chalet Husky, Val d'Isère*

Skiing is about pushing boundaries. On and off the slopes. And no-one is raising the bar further or faster than Scott Dunn, whose Alpine portfolio gets better every year.

Last season, the curtain came up on its latest Val d'Isère Flagship property, Chalet Husky, perfect for powder hounds to share tales of derring-do or novices to relive their inaugural exploits. The second you spy the in-chalet massage room and fully equipped gym, you know you're in for something special, and from the freshly baked patisserie to your personal boot-fitting, the attention to detail and standard of service are exemplary.

A signature Scott Dunn timber design, Husky sleeps up to 14 in seven en-suite bedrooms spread across two lavish floors designed with quirky, contemporary interiors. A glass walkway spans an indoor atrium – complete with illuminated multicoloured floor. Vintage lampshades add an asymmetric charm. And a sofa made entirely out of vintage-denim cushions hits the spot perfectly for end-of-day lounging (but be warned: a combination of ski miles and Chalet Husky cocktails can make it tricky to extricate yourself).

On the ground floor, the pristine pool has a waterfall and swim jets. Less traditional

off-piste entertainment comes in the shape of indoor archery and laser rifle shooting, while anyone looking for a more physical challenge can don a hard hat and have a crack at rock-climbing (well, Husky is built into the mountainside, so why not?).

Of course, the danger of these extracurricular activities is that it's almost possible to overlook the 300km of beautifully groomed runs (and limitless off-piste) that make the Espace Killy one of the world's great ski destinations. Almost, but not quite, especially given the fleet of MPVs standing by to shuttle guests around, and the exclusive children's club – complete with nanny driver service to dovetail with junior skiers' itineraries. All of which is part and parcel of the Flagship service.

Back at Husky, a trio of chalet hosts and a chef ensure that guests don't have to lift a finger. Except, perhaps, to raise the occasional glass, as those aforementioned cocktails vie with Laurent-Perrier for the pre-dinner drinks vote. Worth a toast? Most certainly. ■

By Caroline Hunt

Seven nights from £1,275 per person, including flights, transfers, resort driver service, private chef and children's club or private nanny; scottdunn.com



THIS PAGE, FROM TOP Chalet Husky; the chalet's quirky interior; pool and spa area; **OPPOSITE PAGE** The terrace at The Chedi Andermatt, Switzerland