

Last winter was a record-breaker for snowfall and, with the euro finally dropping slightly against the sterling, it's a great time to take the plunge and book a ski trip. But do it mindfully: climate change is the buzzword this year, and skiers are among the most environmentally aware bunch because we can't avoid the inevitable: winters are getting shorter and less predictable.

FUNKY NEW PLACES TO STAY

New hotels and more unusual forms of accommodation are opening up across the mountains — from piste bashers (machines that groom the snow on the pistes) to tree houses to eco hotels. Here's our pick.

◆ Sleep on the slopes

Head to La Plagne and you can stay overnight in an achingly cool luxury piste basher, then be the first to ski down the mountain in the morning! The Over the Moon snow groomer experience costs €320 for a night, including breakfast and WiFi. Visit skipass-laplagne.com.

◆ Find foodie fun

The legendary Folie Douce chain is opening a hotel in Chamonix this winter, with hostel-style rooms, and premium rooms sleeping up to four people. Don't worry — this is no 18-30s-style location — the après-ski party will run from 4pm to 9pm, but there's also amazing local, gourmet food on offer (in three restaurants), as well as a ski school, in-house spa, heated outdoor pool

and even yoga classes. Room rates start from €37 per person; or go with Ski Weekends and pay £609pp for four nights B&B (January 10-14), sharing a Premium double room inc flights from Gatwick and transfers; skiweekends.com.

◆ Enjoy eco vibes

The Valsana Hotel in Arosa, Switzerland, new last year, is the first hotel in the Alps to be powered by an ice-battery. Cleaning products are eco-friendly and paper is minimal: notices and menus are written on blackboards and plastic is virtually non-existent. There's also a stunning spa, with views out onto the forest behind. It may be 4*, but guests are asked to take the free ski resort bus to the ski lifts rather than a private car. B&B rates cost from CHF420, visit valsana.ch.

TRAVEL LIGHT

Make the most of a short break on the slopes by leaving the UK with only hand luggage — and don't add to the mountain of clothing thrown out each year. Ski Chic is available in 20 resorts across the French Alps, promising to deliver a clean, chic outfit to your accommodation before you arrive — and to collect it on departure. With kit for men, women and children aged between eight and 16, from Fusalp, Poivre Blanc, Quiksilver, Roxy and Salomon. Prices start from €16.65 per day; skichic.com.



The *H&F* SNOWSPORTS *round-up*

WORDS: Abigail Butcher

Find out what's new in the world of the white stuff this year so you can enjoy your wintersports fix to the max



Grigio Camo 7/8 leggings, £59; bornnouli.com



KEEP THE COST DOWN

With Brexit looming, ski companies and tour operators are warning that the price of holidays could rise by a third – especially combined with recent changes to employment law that have changed the face of chalet staff for the coming winter. With staff on a proper wage, companies are finding ways to cut their bills – from using COOK (cookfood.net) food in their (VIP) chalets to offering fewer catered chalets and more hotels and self-catered accommodation. The good news for those who want to go self-catered is that a huge number of catering companies have cropped up across the Alps in recent years, so you can still order in evening meals to cut out the work.

Specialist French Alps ski tour operator Peak Retreats (who just won the Times Travel Editor's Award for outstanding service) has teamed up with resort food delivery service Huski (hu.ski), which guests can use to pre-order meals before they've even left the UK; peakretreats.co.uk. Other catering companies in the Alps include Massif Cuisine (massifcuisine.com), Bon Appetit Alps (bonappetitps.com) and Chalet Kitchen (chaletkitchen.com).



Mons Royale Women's 190 checklist L/S Hoody, £99.99; ellis-brigham.com



Planks Good Times Insulated Jacket, £219.95; planksclothing.com



Women's Mountain Light Boots, £289.82; danner.com



Smith Riot Goggles, £99.99; smithoptics.com



Planks Reunion Soft Shell Pant, £119.95; planksclothing.com



Picture Organic Clothing Wrigley Gloves, £59.99; absolute-snow.co.uk

ECO-FRIENDLY KIT

If you're buying skiwear this winter, try to choose garments made from recycled bottles, those that have been treated to reduce odours (less washing) or even from a company that plants trees for every order. If you buy good kit, look after it; repair and mend older kit; or even rent your skiwear this winter.

LEARN NEW SKILLS

◆ Work on your mindset

British professional snowboarder Jenny Jones is running three workshops this winter for snowboarders wanting to up their game. The four-night Tignes Snowboard & Fitness workshop (December 4-8) includes video analysis, off-snow fitness sessions and a snowboard-specific training plan; the seven-night Japan workshop in Niseko includes coaching and yoga; and the Snowboard & Mindset workshop in Sainte Foy in March includes snowboard coaching, sports psychology and yoga sessions. Prices start from £1,450pp; workshopbyjennyjones.com.

◆ Say goodbye to groomers

Get a chance to see the Northern Lights at the same time as progressing off piste in the Swedish resorts of Riksgränsen and Björklidin on a new skills trip with Ski Safari. These quiet ski resorts are excellent confidence builders, where skiers and snowboarders can join together to start

learning skills to get away from the groomers. Hosted by Ski Safari founder Richard Rice and aimed at confident intermediate skiers and above (you must be able to do parallel turns on a red run), the trip runs from 21 April for seven nights, costing from £2,600pp including flights, transfers, accommodation, lift pass, guiding, instruction and some avalanche training; skisafari.com.

◆ Go deeper into the backcountry

Ski touring is the eco-friendly way to ski, and Ellis Brigham Mountain Sports is reporting double-digit growth in the sales of ski touring equipment in the past year. Thinking about trying it but not sure you have the time or money? The Discover the Backcountry weekend in Scotland, 2-3 February, will be run by ski-touring guide Blair Aitken, founder of British-Backcountry.com, aimed at newcomers to ski-touring or those wishing to improve their skills. The cost of the weekend is

heavily subsidised by Ellis Brigham, at just £25 (travel and accommodation not included); ellis-brigham.com/advice-inspiration/blogs/events/discover-backcountry-weekend.

◆ Try non-ski activities

Learn to ice climb, glacier hike and go snowshoeing while staying high in the French Alps at the Terminal Neige Refuge du Montanvers in Chamonix. Set at the edge of France's largest glacier, the Mer de Glace, Terminal Neige Refuge du Montanvers's Snowshoes & Snowflakes package includes a two-night stay at the refuge on a half-board basis, a guided snowshoeing excursion, ice climbing initiation and glacier hike – plus all equipment needed for this snowy adventure. Prices start from €850 (approx £765) per double room half-board and €575 (approx £517) per person for a stay in a dormitory room (sleeping up to 10 people). Visit refuge.terminal-neige.com.



TRAVEL MORE SUSTAINABLY

In 2007, US snowboarder Jeremy Jones set up a sustainable movement called Protect our Winters – or POW for short – which has gained massive traction across the industry. UK POW ambassador Warren Smith, who runs ski academies in Verbier, Switzerland and Cervinia, Italy, has noticed winters have changed dramatically in a short space of time. 'Winters are starting later and finishing earlier,' he says. 'I've been teaching on glaciers for the past 25 years and every year it's startling how much they are receding and melting. We need to create awareness and travel more sustainably – the simple things can have the biggest impact; this has to be a wave.'

How to be more climate-conscious on your ski holiday:



Take the train instead of flying.



Buy good-quality, eco-friendly kit.



Pass on outgrown kids' gear to others.



Eat local food and drink.



Drink tap water using a metal water bottle or flask.



Try ski touring instead of using ski lifts.

Take the train instead of flying – or fill a car

Did you know that travelling by train cuts carbon dioxide emissions by up to 90 per cent, as opposed to flying? Flying carries a carbon cost of 285kg per person, so if you're heading to the Alps, consider the train. It takes around six and a half hours to reach the mountains from London, and you don't have to pay for carriage of skis and luggage. Win, win.

If this isn't realistic, why not try to take a regional flight from an airport closer to you and jump on a train at the other end? Many ski resorts – from Kitzbühel to the Maurienne to St Moritz – have train stations in or near resort so take advantage.

Or fill a car with friends and drive out, to a cost of just 70kg of CO₂ per person. ■