

Shoop shoop

For affluent travellers, Europe’s leading ski resorts offer far more than access to snow-covered mountains, with everything from world-class luxury shopping to ultimate relaxation

The finest European resorts combine exceptional skiing with distinctive villages, sophisticated accommodation, gastronomy, wellness, and experiences that make the mountains as appealing off the slopes as they are on them. Yet each resort has its own character, and the ideal choice can depend greatly on ability.

ZERMATT, SWITZERLAND

Zermatt has one of the most recognisable settings in the Alps, with the Matterhorn rising above the resort. Its ski domain extends across Switzerland and into Cervinia in Italy, creating a fantastic international skiing experience. The Matterhorn

Ski Paradise reaches almost 4,000 metres and currently offers 334 kilometres of pistes across 48 lifts.

Beginners can start on dedicated introductory terrain before progressing to the wider network, while the resort’s ski schools and mountain guides offer programmes for more experienced visitors. The altitude and breadth of the area allow stronger skiers to seek out more challenging pistes, freeride terrain and ski-touring routes.

Zermatt’s village is another significant part of its appeal. The centre is pedestrianised, and its mix of traditional buildings, luxury hotels, restaurants and mountain chalets creates an atmosphere

quite special, and different from a purpose-built resort.

The setting also makes even a straightforward ski day memorable. The Matterhorn appears from numerous points around the ski area, while high-altitude restaurants provide opportunities to pause and take in the surrounding peaks.

zermatt.swiss

COURCHEVEL 1850, FRANCE

At the top of the Courchevel valley, Courchevel 1850 is synonymous with high-end Alpine holidays. The resort has an extensive choice of luxury hotels and private chalets, alongside designer boutiques, sophisticated restaurants and an

après-ski scene aimed at visitors seeking a particularly polished mountain experience. Its position within Les Trois Vallées also gives skiers access to one of the world’s largest interconnected ski areas.

For beginners, the resort offers dedicated learning areas and pistes where newcomers can develop their technique before progressing further. Professional instructors and private lessons make it possible to tailor the experience to individual ability.

Advanced skiers have an entirely different playground. The wider Three Valleys provides an enormous range of terrain, while the Courchevel sector itself includes steeper runs and opportunities for guided off-piste skiing. The scale of the surrounding terrain means experienced visitors can explore a different route every day.

Away from skiing, Courchevel 1850’s appeal lies in its concentration of luxury. Fine dining, spa treatments, shopping, and private chalet experiences provide plenty to occupy those

who want their winter holiday to extend beyond the slopes.
courchevel.com

CORTINA D’AMPEZZO, ITALY

Cortina d’Ampezzo brings Italian style to the Dolomites. Surrounded by dramatic limestone formations, the resort combines an internationally recognised skiing heritage with an elegant town, strong culinary traditions and a broad selection of hotels and wellness experiences. It also has a particularly distinguished sporting history, having hosted the 1956 Winter Olympics and the alpine skiing events of the 2026 Winter Olympics.

Skiing is divided across several sectors, including Tofane and Faloria-Cristallo, with pistes ranging from easy blues to technically demanding black runs. The variety makes it possible for beginners to learn in relatively forgiving terrain, while experienced skiers can seek out steeper descents and more technical routes.

Cortina is particularly suited to travellers who don’t want skiing to dominate every moment of the holiday. A day on the mountain can be followed by a long Italian lunch, a spa treatment, or an afternoon exploring the town. The surrounding Dolomites also provide opportunities for snowshoeing, ski touring and scenic mountain excursions. Its combination of dramatic scenery and Italian hospitality gives Cortina a character that is difficult to reproduce elsewhere in the Alps.
cortinadampezzo.it/en

Left: The famous Matterhorn from a chalet balcony in Zermatt
Above: A charming village near Cortina d’Ampezzo



LECH ZÜRS, AUSTRIA

Lech Zürs occupies a particularly respected position within the Arlberg, an area with more than a century of skiing history. It forms part of Ski Arlberg, Austria’s largest interconnected ski area, where more than 300 kilometres of pistes are linked by 85 lifts. The region also has more than 200 kilometres of freeride terrain, giving accomplished skiers considerable scope beyond the groomed runs.

Broad, relatively gentle pistes and professional ski schools provide a comfortable introduction for beginners, while lessons can progress into more advanced instruction and guided mountain tours.

For expert skiers, the Arlberg is considerably more demanding. Steep ski routes, deep-snow descents and extensive off-piste terrain make it one of Austria’s strongest choices for freeriding.

Lech itself has a refined and relatively discreet atmosphere.

High-quality hotels, restaurants and slope-side facilities provide the comforts expected of a luxury resort without requiring the visitor to sacrifice access to serious skiing.
lechzuers.com/en

MEGÈVE, FRANCE

Megève offers a distinctly different experience from the larger, purpose-built ski domains. Its historic village centre, stone-and-timber architecture and traditional Alpine atmosphere ➤



Above: The beautiful resort of Megève oozes class while enjoying a welcoming environment for all in the Haute-Savoie region, near Mont Blanc **Below:** Courchevel 1850 is a part of the Three Valleys, next to Val Thorens and Meribel where you could ski a different run every day for a week

give the resort a strong sense of place, while its restaurants, boutiques and hotels have made it a longstanding favourite among visitors seeking an elegant French mountain escape.

The wider Évasion Mont-Blanc ski domain provides around 400 kilometres of pistes, giving the resort considerably more skiing than its charming village centre might initially suggest.

Beginners can take advantage of dedicated learning areas and gentle pistes before gradually moving into more extensive terrain. More experienced skiers can explore the surrounding sectors, with a mixture of open mountain and runs providing variety throughout the day.

Megève's appeal extends strongly into gastronomy. Traditional Savoyard cooking sits alongside sophisticated

contemporary restaurants, while the village provides an appealing setting for an afternoon away from the slopes. Shopping, spas, and horse-drawn carriage rides add further alternatives for non-skiers. megeve-tourisme.fr/en

DAVOS, SWITZERLAND

Davos is one of the Alps' historic winter destinations and has a noticeably broader urban character than many of the traditional resort villages. The surrounding Davos Klosters region offers several separate ski areas,

allowing visitors to experience different types of terrain during a single stay.

Beginners will find that learning areas can be accessed easily, making it possible to start close to the town before progressing further afield. Stronger skiers have access to more demanding pistes and freeride opportunities across the surrounding mountains.

The resort also works particularly well for groups with different interests. Skiers can spend the day on the slopes

while others explore winter walking routes, snowshoe trails, wellness facilities, or the town's restaurants and shops. Its extensive range of dining options also contributes to a livelier evening atmosphere than is found in some smaller Alpine villages.

Davos' long association with international business and political gatherings has also contributed to its cosmopolitan character, giving the resort a somewhat different social atmosphere from more traditional ski villages. davos.ch/en

All six can accommodate beginners, while advanced skiers will find considerably more challenging options once they move beyond the easiest pistes. The difference lies less in whether a resort can cater to different abilities and more in the character of the experience surrounding the skiing.

For wealthy travellers, a great Alpine holiday is no longer defined solely by the number of kilometres on a piste map. It is the combination of mountain, accommodation, food, service, culture and atmosphere; with the freedom to make the holiday as adventurous or indulgent as desired. ■

