

HOW THE *Other* *Half* SKI

♦ PETER WATTS

HELICOPTERS, HOT TUBS AND
ROYALS – YOU’VE NEVER HAD A
SKI HOLIDAY LIKE THIS

Expect A-listers
luxury to light up a
stay at the Chalet
Spa in Verbier

WHEN IT COMES TO SKIING HOLIDAYS, MOST OF US

would be happy flying down a mountain with two planks of wood tied to our feet. And for après ski? Give us a glass of something warming and a bucketful of melted cheese and we’ll be all rosy cheeks and big smiles until bedtime.

But for some people a skiing holiday just isn’t the same if their five-bedroom chalet doesn’t come with its own private cinema, an all terrain vehicle to drive them to the resort’s nearest Michelin-starred restaurant and a chauffeur to ferry them home again afterwards. Welcome to the world of the luxury skiing holiday, a parallel universe in which you’ll find every whim taken care of, as long as you’re prepared to surrender your credit card at the door.

Belinda Archer is editor of *The Chic Chalet Guide* (chicchaletguide.co.uk), an independent guide to the most luxurious chalets in the Alps, and understands the expectations of high-end holidaygoers. “Luxury is a much over-used and abused term, and many ski chalets claim to be luxury when they are anything but,” she says. “The ones we concentrate on cost a minimum of around £1,000 per person per week, and many are much more expensive than that.”

TAKE, FOR EXAMPLE, Chalet Spa in Verbier (chaletspa.com). “This is a genuine designer pad,” Archer enthuses, “almost more Ibiza villa than mountain hideaway. It bristles with every sort of gadget imaginable, from Magic Mirror TVs (where you point the remote at what looks like a mirror and it becomes a TV screen) to a fully equipped Technogym, a Concept rowing machine, a pop-up TV screen in the outdoor Jacuzzi, a 10m swimming pool, a cinema, an Xbox, Wii and PS3, a selection of perfumes in the toilet from Prada’s Amber to Vera Wang’s Truly Pink, and even an open-top dune buggy for guests to ride around town.” It is, says Archer, a chalet like no other, and will cost you, gulp, around £4,600 per person per week.

But luxury isn’t just about the place you stay while you’re away. There’s a huge range of services and facilities available to those skiers who can afford them – the only question is where you decide to draw the line... >

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Clockwise from below: Dining at Farnes De Marie; a helicopter to the slopes; and the luxurious Cheval Spa in Verbier



"LUXURY IS A MUCH OVER-USED AND OFTEN ABUSED TERM"

FANCY A DRINK THAT'LL BE €5,000
Archer says that this luxury end of the market has barely been touched by the global recession. The rich still head for the resorts of St Moritz, Verbier, Val d'Isère, Zermatt and Courchevel, which are luxury destinations in themselves. Courchevel has seven Michelin-starred restaurants (including four with two stars), while Mégeve has eight, including La Ravère and L'Idéal, considered among the best on any mountain in the world.

The Swiss resort Verbier is a favourite haunt of royals old (Prince Andrew) and new (Kate Middleton), with a nightclub, Coco, that has an entire wall covered in gold leaf and a drink that costs just over €5,000. 'The Coco Chalet' is made from Krug champagne and Hennessy cognac, comes with a silver key entitling the drinker to a lifetime's membership of the club, and is served in a glass that looks like a chalet carved out of ice. Cristal, needless to say, is the Champagne of choice for many customers.



GET THERE FASTER

You could just take a bus or train from the airport to your resort like everyone else, but if you've got the cash why not book a helicopter transfer? Pure Ski Company (pureski-company.com) offers speedy rides from Geneva and a handful of other airports to select resorts across the Alps, slashing travel time to as little as 18 minutes. "Flying from Geneva to a resort like Val d'Isère takes around 40 minutes," says Eric

Cartier, Manager at Pure Ski. "We take VIPs, executives and other people who need to make the most of their time – the landing at Geneva is very expensive, so that transfer costs around €4,000 but we can carry four or five people onboard."

At this level of luxury, though, it's not just about saving time. Flying over the peaks and valleys of the Alps, Cartier's helicopters give their passengers an unparalleled view over the surrounding countryside, and he says that pilots are happy to take the scenic route when the weather's right. Pure Ski also offers helisking in Italy and sightseeing tours across the whole region, making it the ultimate in luxury mountain travel.

LOOK LIKE A MILLION EUROS

Big with Russian billionaires is the French resort Courchevel 1850 in the Three Valleys. The shopping centre has Dior, Gucci, Armani and Chanel and the restaurants are sublime, but the pièce de résistance may be the

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Clockwise from here, textured interiors at Farnes De Marie; Louis Vuitton boutique in Cheval Blanc; Paul Smith skis and outerwear from Moncler



luxurious Givenchy Spa Des Nieves in the Hotel Cheval Blanc (chevalblanc.com), which overlooks the pistes. It's decorated in soothing colours and has a monumental pool, but you can also have an 'experience shower', which uses sound and light to make you feel like you're in your own personal, very hot thunderstorm, or the C170 signature treatment, the Hydra-Sparkling Facial. The spa also employs dedicated skier-therapists who know exactly which muscles need massaging before and after skiing.

Meanwhile, at the Farnes De Marie hotel in Mégeve (farnesdemarie.com), treatments include the 'soft pack system', in which you are covered in mud, wrapped in cellophane and placed in a deflated rubber boat, which is slowly filled with water to give the impression that you are floating.

SKIS: PAUL SMITH OR PRADA?

The ski shop at Verbier flogs Prada ski jackets for €1,000, but even at these prices it's tough to look stylish in skiwear. The Moncler range gives it a good go, though, with double-layered down-stuffed coats that cost up to €900. As for skis themselves, a number of recent collaborations have seen luxury labels team up with high-end sports firms: Paul Smith and Edelweiser came up with the Paul Smith Swing 162 at around €760, while car manufacturer Bentley



and Swiss sportswear company 'Zai' have produced a limited-edition Supersports ski set for around €7,200. If you really want to know that you're the most stylishly equipped skier on the slopes, though, there's really only one option – and for once it's not the most expensive. Prada is still the ultimate label for skiing fashionistas, and Prada-Volant skis are a rip at €1,100. Now where did I put those two planks of wood?

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