

# Top tips from a seasoned skier

By [Sean Hough](#)

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We're already four months into 2016 - time to start planning your summer holiday! Instead of going to a balmy beach this season, swap your bikini and beach bats for a pair of skis and woolly hat and take a trip to the slopes of the majestic French Alps. Here, keen skier Sean Hough, CEO of South Africa's leisure travel specialist [Pentravel](#), shares the inside scoop on how to leave your wallet at home and get your ski on this summer.

## Magic March

The slopes are open for business between December and April, but, in my experience, the best time to head north is during March. The resorts are quieter than during the busy Christmas period and, if you're a first-time skier, there's also less chance of crashing into fellow newbies as the slopes are a lot less crowded. Also, while the snow's solid enough for a good morning ride, it's also warm and sunny; perfect cocktail weather.

Top tip: If you can only travel during December and January, book a resort that is higher in altitude. Sufficient snow has been coming later every year so the lower you are on the slope the more chance you'll ski on slush instead of powder.



## Choosing a resort

France, Italy and Switzerland offer the best conditions for skiing and, in France alone, Club Med – the leading all-inclusive ski operator – offers visitors 17 different resort options. At 2300m above sea level [Val Thorens](#) is the highest ski resort in Europe and caters for all levels with blue runs for newbies to off-piste (ungroomed slopes) adventures for the more experienced. Family-friendly [Valmorel](#), on the other hand, a smaller resort that is located on the lower altitudes of Grand Domaine, is best for beginners. Or, for a little lux, there's the charming [Chamonix](#) resort, which looks out onto Mont Blanc, the highest mountain range in the Alps.

Top tip: Regardless of where you stay, make sure you can 'ski in and ski out', i.e. can you hop onto a ski lift or gondola (ski car) with your boots, skis and all from your hotel? It makes life a lot easier as you don't have to lug your heavy gear around - you just wear it.

## Activity for all ages

A skiing holiday is an active holiday and a great way to spend quality time with your kids or teens while having fun together. First-timers spend a few days in ski school where experienced instructors show you the ropes while little ones are catered and cared for in a special kids' class. Of course, if you're an adrenaline junkie, or have skied before, you can hit the slopes at your leisure.

Besides skiing there are plenty of other in- and outdoor activities to enjoy too: go snowboarding, ice-skating, hiking with an experienced guide or simply rest after an action-packed day in the day spa, heated pools or Turkish baths. Surrounded by magnificent mountain-scapes you could also just take five to drink in the natural wonder of your snow-covered surroundings.

Top tip: Après ski, get your groove on and head to the infamous 'bucket list' bar brand, [La Folie Douce](#). With its dancers, divas and DJs it's been dubbed the Ibiza of the Alps.

## Eat, drink and be merry

No holiday is complete without the obligatory feast. And Club Med does not disappoint. As all meals and drinks are included, it would be rude not to overindulge – besides you can work off the extra calories on the slopes. Breakfast is a grand affair with waffles, pancakes, cured meat and local cheeses. But don't be fooled into thinking it'll do until dinner; active bodies need fuel and there is no shortage in supply. Enjoy a hearty lunch on the sunny deck or inside the dining room, and tuck into tasty treats with afternoon tea. After sunset, dinner is the main act: start with a fondue or steak tartare, followed by lavaret - a freshwater fish in the salmon family - or cheesy croquet monsieur and end with a Savoy sponge cake. A range of international dishes is on offer too, as is a kids menu.

## What to wear

Typically, temperatures range between minus 15 and 10 degrees Celsius - so you'll probably have to buy or borrow some warm kit. While boots, ski equipment and your helmet are included, as is a ski pass, you'll need a waterproof ski jacket, long johns (in December only), waterproof gloves and non-slip walking boots, thick ski socks and goggles or sunglasses as well as sun block.

Top tip: Block out the brrrrr with a hat that covers your ears and a buff to cover your neck and mouth.

## Getting there

Packages are, typically, seven days and run from Sunday to Sunday. You can fly into Geneva International Airport by either going direct, via Dubai, Paris, Amsterdam or Frankfurt. Once there, the connecting transfer takes between one-and-a-half to five hours depending on where you stay. You'll need a Schengen visa and travel insurance is an absolute must – ask your agent to arrange this when you book.

*For more advice on 2016/17 ski holiday adventures, go to [www.pentravel.co.za](http://www.pentravel.co.za)*

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