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Where the super-rich go skiing

The ultra-wealthy spare no expense on the slopes, with the latest must-haves including private jets, bullet-proof chalets and skiing butlers

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There's no denying that, for the majority of the nation, these are straitened times. But for the super-rich, the urge to run for the snow-capped mountains of the Alps is greater than ever – skiing has never been so in vogue.

The luxury winter holiday market is booming. Bookings for ultra-glamorous chalets, with starting prices over €25,000 and rising to [€620,000 per week](#), are flourishing. VistaJet ([vistajet.com](#)), which offers members access to a fleet of more than 360 aircraft, saw demand for private jet travel to Austria, France and Switzerland more than double (up 62 per cent) last winter.

A surge in long-term luxury rentals, of a few weeks or more, is also growing apace. “There's been such an influx of international visitors placing their children in the local private school here that a second one, the ski-in/ski-out Copperfield International School, opened in January 2021. Both are over-subscribed despite annual fees of CHF40,000 (£35,000),” says Tom Avery, founder of the specialist operator Ski Verbier Exclusive ([skiverbierexclusive.com](#)), which caters to guests looking to temporarily relocate to the snow.



VistaJet saw private jet travel to Austria, France and Switzerland more than double last winter

Ski holidays have always appealed to the highest echelons of society, as Rupert Longsdon, founder of the specialist travel agency Oxford Ski ([oxfordski.com](#)), explains: “There's nothing new in the global elite choosing to make the Alps their winter lifestyle destination. From [St Moritz](#) in the 1920s and [Megève](#) in the 1960s to [Courchevel](#), Lech and [Verbier](#)

today, Alpine hotels and chalets simply supersede most other destinations in terms of luxury and service.”



Today's ultra-wealthy require luxury touches to be added at every turn of their winter holiday

Yet the five-star-plus ski holiday is evolving. Back in the 1980s, the average cost of a ski holiday in the UK [was £229](#) and luxury operators could match a group of skiers with a smart catered chalet for some £10,000, throw in a day's heliskiing and bottomless champagne and leave them to it, with no complaints. Today's ultra-wealthy require luxury touches to be added at every turn of their winter holiday, and their craziest whims to be fulfilled, with price tags to match.

The new normal

Yesterday's exceptional has become today's norm: in the world's first self-described seven-star chalet, Chalet N in [Lech](#), guests can expect a fleet of chauffeur-driven Land Rovers to scoop them up from the private jet airport at Innsbruck to deliver them to a world of bullet-proof windows, titanium cutlery, shower curtains fashioned from Swarovski crystals and pillows embroidered with their initials.



Chalet N in Lech: bullet-proof glass, titanium cutlery and Swarovski shower curtains | CREDIT: Klaus Lorke

Just across the pistes, in the twin Arula Chalets, you'll find spa walls crafted from Himalayan salt, a self-playing Steinway piano, a private ice rink and an army of staff working around the clock. Guests staying at the new Les Chalets Airelles in Courchevel will discover nightly turn-down gifts of costly Guerlain cosmetics or Fusalp ski clothing, as well as a ski valet to place skis on the snow for guests each morning.

Sarah Sundstedt of the Alpine luxury operator Bramble Ski ([brambleski.com](https://www.brambleski.com)) says: "Recent years have seen us adopt next-level service to tailor trips precisely to our clients' very specific needs. We smooth every step of their journey, from unpacking their bags on arrival to packing them on departure, layering each item in gold tissue paper."



Arula Chalets is home to a self-playing Steinway piano and a private ice rink

Indeed, it now takes the delivery of tigers as the finishing touch for a party to raise a manicured eyebrow (yes, it did happen). Michelin-star chefs are helicoptered into chalets to whip up lunch, fresh grass procured daily for the toileting needs of prized pet pooches and drone light shows own the night skies above sprawling chalets (much to the ire of Verbier's locals).

Instructor or skiing butler?

An integral part of the ultra-luxury ski holiday experience is the pre-arrival concierge service, during which intimate personal preferences are shared with the chalet's dedicated manager. It has become standard procedure in the top chalets to secure preferred tipples, restaurant tables, heli-skiing guides, yoga instructors and masseuses well before the arrival of guests. In the most personal of touches, some residences offers guests the option of framed family photographs on bedside tables.



Les Chalets Airelles: Guests enjoy nightly turn-down gifts of costly Guerlain cosmetics

Unsurprisingly, the world's top chalets are staffed by experts in the field of customer service – although many guests still insist on flying in their own staff. As Longsdon explains, exceptional service extends to the slopes, where instructors are often employed by a family year after year. “The cream of the instructor crop might joke about being ski butlers, spending more time carrying their clients’ make-up and lunch outfit changes than teaching them to ski, but they become trusted members of their guests’ staff retinue.”

Founded by ski instructors, Bramble Ski tapped into this trend with its Bramble Ski Pro service. This elite team is trained by the renowned Ecole Hôtelière Suisse in Lausanne, the pinnacle of hospitality management tuition. Instructors learn to become as adept at teaching ski drills as handling tycoon tantrums – they’re then at guests’ disposal for two days free of charge (worth over €1,000) when staying in a catered Bramble Ski property (prices from €27,820 per week).

IN NUMBERS**The running bill for the ultimate winter holiday**

One week in Val d'Isère

- €14,110: Private jet flights from London to Geneva with VistaJet (vistajet.com).

Total: €123,310[Expand to read more](#) +**Under the radar**

Channelling hipster New York and Shoreditch with its understated take on chalet life, with properties featuring slick interiors, quirky artworks and underground brands more typically found in members clubs in Hoxton, Hip Hideouts (hiphideouts.com) is well accustomed to hosting famous guests, who value the operator's ability to deliver discretion, in [Val d'Isère](#). As Caroline Mothersole, head of sales and marketing, explains: "Our clients now prize discrete family time, without any social media presence, above all else."

She goes on to explain: "We'll arrange an assistant to greet guests off their private jet, pass security control and usher them to their helicopter transfer up to Val. Once here, we work with the best local ski guides to whisk them through ski lift queues and to secluded tables at mountain restaurants. We regularly host A-listers here for a week or more without anybody noticing."

Blow-outs and buy-outs

In the Swiss resort of Verbier, polar explorer turned founding director of Ski Verbier Exclusive (skiverbierexclusive.com), Tom Avery, has become adept at arranging lavish experiences and blow-out parties in secret venues. "As guests are staying longer, they're embracing mountain life and culture in all its forms, with skiing becoming a secondary element of their trip," he explains.



Heli-picnics: a modern take on classic Swiss culture | CREDIT: Above and Beyond Verbier

Avery regularly arranges for guests to tailor their own heli-picnic – taking a scenic helicopter flight around the Matterhorn before landing at 3,400m to feast on lobster, on a table carved from snow. With prices starting from CHF15,000 (£13,240) for two, for a 15-minute flight followed by champagne, cheese fondue and petit fours (add £10,000 for 500g of beluga caviar), it's a modern take on classic Swiss culture.

For those special occasions, when even the larger ultra-chalets in the Alps can't accommodate, the increasingly popular option is the hotel buy-out. As Longsdon explains: "With just 30 to 40 rooms, many Alpine hotels are the perfect size for these exclusive-use events, such as Le K2 Altitude in Courchevel and La Mourra Hotel Village in Val d'Isère. Guests looking to push the boat out will often work with a production company to choreograph a three-day extravaganza." Wealthy hosts will splurge what Longsdon loosely describes as "a seven-figure sum" for the privilege.



The heli-picnic in Verbier: guests enjoy a 15-minute flight followed by champagne, cheese fondue and petit fours | CREDIT: Sebastien Baritussio

All the gear

Skiing might have become a secondary activity for the super-rich, but that's not to say they're willing to scrimp on kit, whether they use it or not. The hottest clothing story on the pistes this winter comes from a new collaboration between Fusalp and Swiss luxury watchmaker Zenith.

The French sportswear brand has designed a capsule Zenith wardrobe with 'storm cuff' sleeves on the ski jackets (from £1,570) – a zippered opening has been designed to facilitate the viewing of the wearer's limited-edition Swiss Defy Classic Skeleton Fusalp watch (from CHF 9,900).

The A-list is topping and tailing outfits with helmet and skis from the new Bomber x Bentley Ice Edition too. Handcrafted in Italy, the limited-edition skis (\$2,750) and carbon helmet (\$995) are adorned with Winged B badges and a three-dimensional diamond pattern that echoes the tessellation of Bentley's leather upholstery for a little touch of home on the slopes.