

# Skiing Focus Report

## I don't forget your smartphone

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With little sign of recovery in the strength of the pound, which is about 25 per cent lower against a basket of major currencies compared with 2007 — staying in ski resorts will seem expensive.

For this reason all-inclusive packages, launched a few winters ago, are expected to be strong sellers. Crystal, which is at the forefront of this trend, has introduced inclusive packages at three hotels, offering flights, accommodation, transfers, equipment, lift pass, drinks and packed lunches from £725 a week.

This could also be the year to try somewhere other than big-name resorts such as Méribel and Val d'Isère. Companies such as Peak Retreats, Ski Peak and Le Ski feature resorts that are lesser known but linked to good skiing and will let skiers who still want to go to France do so without incurring stratospheric costs.

Despite the economic gloom, hoteliers and investors have been splashing their money on luxury new mountain hide-

aways. We look at how traditional resorts in Austria and Switzerland are reinventing themselves to appeal to a fresh audience and discover the new face of New England.

Skiers stuck on a plateau have always turned to instructors to lift them to a higher plane but we find out how a life coach can help to boost your confidence and improve your technique. We also learn how the youth charity Snow-Camp uses winter sports to open up unexpected possibilities to inner-city teenagers.

Finally, do not forget to take your smartphone on the slopes. This year has seen a huge growth in the number of apps offered by resorts. Whistler in Canada, and Serre Chevalier in France are bringing out new goodies for iPhone users, while Vail, Breckenridge, Keystone and Heavenly in America have upgraded their EpicMix app, letting you show off and share with your envious friends photos and videos of the vertical you have skied.

**MARK FRARY**



Inner-city teens glimpse another world

## Learning curves

It is hard to sell skiing as social work in today's economic climate. That is until you see the work of the innovative Snow-Camp charity and the pride with which young people such as 17-year-old Tony from Westminster speak of their time at the camps.

Enthusiasing about his experience of skiing in France, he says: "My best achievement was going down the massive mountains with speed, control and stability. Through the life skills sessions I learnt how to control my anger in positive ways."

The idea for Snow-Camp, which seeks to introduce disadvantaged young people such as Tony to the world of winter sports, came from Dan Charlish, the director of the charity. He was working on a youth project in South London and noticed how obsessed the teenagers were with snowboarding computer games. This led him to take a small group to stay at an apartment in Les Deux Alpes, France, for two weeks.

That was in 2003 and now Snow-Camp works with 16 London boroughs and 400 disadvantaged 13 to 19-year-olds a year. There are four courses on the Snow-Camp curriculum. An intensive two-day introduction takes place at the Chatham dry ski slope in Kent and the Snow Centre in Hemel Hempstead. This is followed by a six-day "graduate" programme held over six weekends at Hemel.

Charlish says: "We develop their snow sports skills, while also looking at vocational opportunities in the ski industry, and arrange talks by seasonal workers and instructors. We try to open up this world and show them that it is not as closed to them as they might think."

Life skills sessions are a crucial part of the process and continue at the Snow-Camp residential course, on which the teenagers spend six days in Aviemore, Scotland, skiing on real snow by day and taking part in group discussions each evening. This leads to the Snow-Camp Excel course, run with Snowsport England.

Charlish says: "By this stage there are usually 20 kids left out of the original intake of 400 and they go to Les Deux Alpes to earn their Level 1 instructor qualification. Twenty qualified last year and it was truly a great moment."

The expensive world of winter sports is not an obvious vehicle for changing the lives of inner-city teenagers. Cuts have also affected Snow-Camp's work to the point where Charlish launched the Good City Ski Company, through which groups and businesses can book trips, to raise funds.

Ed Leigh, patron of Snow-Camp and a *Ski Sunday* TV presenter, is effusive about the positive influence of the camps. "They give these kids a glimpse of something so different that it could totally change their lives and attitudes," he says.

**MATT BARR**



at offers access to the pier in Switzerland but cost is set to bring the riaz to the attention of rts enthusiasts. The iane, refurbished by ondon-based interior in four double rooms he master suite has a drcrafted from moun-Auriane comes with h movies on demand tub. A week's exclusive h board costs between

Natural high: guests enjoy the majestic mountain views from Chalet Auriane

the mountain to the St Anton from the t après-ski bar under schnapps seems too now stay at a new hotel he Mooser, with eight nine suites in contem-ering rough stone and ens on December 2. It O a room per day based

esort of Megève the rme de mon Père, the c retreat of the cele-veyrat, has reopened gement as a chalet ns and suites. Chalet nises gourmet food, nch chef Julien Burlat, cuisine at the Dôme

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The master suite has a huge bed crafted from larch trunks

in Antwerp. Guests pay from £394 a room a night.

A more exotic location is Sochi in Russia, the venue for the 2014 Winter Olympics, which is appearing in the brochures of UK tour operators, including Crystal Ski, for the first time this winter. Staying at the Grand Hotel Polyana, similar to a North American resort hotel, for a week costs from about £1,125 per person half-board.

The choice of places to stay in Avoriaz, France, at the heart of the 650km French-Swiss Portes du Soleil ski area, has grown this winter thanks to new developments by Pierre & Vacances. The group has built 369 apartments, ranging from the three-star Maeva Residence L'Electra to the five-star Residence L'Amara, which has chalet-style apartments built in traditional wood and stone.

A week's self-catering at L'Amara, which opens in December and has its own spa and pool, costs from £1,211 through Erna Low, based on four sharing a one-bedroom apartment, with a sofa bed in the lounge. The price includes a Eurotunnel crossing.

Les Arcs in the Paradiski region of France adds a four-star residence as part of the new Edenarc development, in a handy slopeside location above Arc 1800. The first of the buildings, Les Souverains, opening on December 15, has one, two and three bedroom apartments, indoor and outdoor pools and a spa. A week in a one-bedroom apartment costs from £761 self-catering.