

DIFFERENT SLOPES

Tired of traditional mountain resorts, adventurous skiers are going out of their way to find unique, unspoilt alternatives. Lauren Steventon reports

Skiing is synonymous with high-octane adventure. So why do we keep returning to the same old slopes, where the world and its entourage seem to have descended to show off their Chanel skis or Dior snow suits? Sometimes a ski trip seems more about waiting for the lift or posing at the bar than speeding across the snow. However, as more and more skiers are discovering, this doesn't have to be the case. How about skiing in Scandinavia, Eastern Europe – even the Lebanon? "People are looking to avoid trails of ski

schools and chair-lift queues, instead seeking a destination that they can experience on a personal level," says Claire Knill, marketing director of travel agency Black Tomato, which organises bespoke ski trips across the globe. "By seeking an adventurous destination, they can combine skiing with an alternative way to see the mountains, whether it be by helicopter, dog-sledding or boat, and experience a completely unique après-ski culture." Maybe it's time to get out the atlas and start planning something a little different this ski season.

Kvitfjell, Norway



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Skiing is a way of life in Norway – they've been at it since at least 5,000 BC, as the slopes offer guaranteed, good-quality snow for six months of the year. There is certainly a much more relaxed vibe than the Alps. Kvitfjell was built for the 1994 Lillehammer Olympics and has become one of the most modern ski resorts in northern Europe. It's just two-and-a-half hours from Oslo airport and easily accessible either by car or train (in fact the railway station is ski in, ski out). The 29km of runs include everything from green slopes for beginners to an Olympic downhill run. Facilities are modern and slick, in true Scandinavian style, and there is an abundance of other icy activities such as dog-sledding, ice-climbing, sleigh-racing (romperaciade) or even wine and cognac tasting. kvitfjell.no

✳ **Getting there:** Ski train from Oslo or Lillehammer (nsb.no); 2 hours 30 minutes by car from Oslo, 45 minutes from Lillehammer

✳ **Equipment hire:** Sport 1 Kvitfjell (+47 92 67 77 45, sport1@kvitfjell.no) and White Mountain Sports (studioh.no)

✳ **Stay:** Traditional mountain luxury at ski in, ski out GudbrandsGard Hotel (gudbrandsgard.no)

Krvavec, Slovenia



Neighbours Italy and Croatia might be more famous, but little Slovenia has her fair share of hidden gems. Almost half of the country is elevated, meaning plenty of mountains and plenty of slopes. Combine that with 100–150 days of natural and assisted snow and it's starting to sound pretty tempting. The ski infrastructure and scene isn't as

large as the Alps, but it mixes modernising lifts and accommodation (at a fraction of the alpine price) with an authentic mountain atmosphere. Krvavec is just 20km from Ljubljana, so a day trip is perfectly possible. However, should you be seduced by this pretty resort's charms, there are also activities such as cross-country skiing, climbing, hiking and skiing in Triglav National Park to keep you occupied for longer. It's more suited to intermediate and up, with more than 18km of expert and intermediate runs, but there are 5km of easier slopes to get beginners started. rtc-krvavec.si

✳ **Getting there:** 15 minutes drive from Ljubljana

✳ **Equipment hire:** Boris Strel (+386 4 27 11 807)

✳ **Stay:** Pack your thermals and sleep at Igloo Village (eskimska-vas.si). Keep it to one night – there are no showers!

Jezerine/Kolašin, Montenegro



Montenegro might be better known for its coastlines and casinos, but it also offers first-rate spots for skiing (alpine, Nordic, downhill), snowmobiling, climbing, ice-fishing and other wintry sports. The tiny town of Kolašin is surrounded by mountains and offers an excellent slice of high-altitude life. It's also just 10 miles from the impressive Biogradska National Park, one of the last untouched forests in Europe. For more of a resort feel, head 15 minutes to Jezerine on Bjelašnica mountain. Here the altitude of almost 1km promises snow right through until summer. Slopes stretch for more than 14.5km (with the longest run 5km) and are maintained to competition standards. In addition, a modern infrastructure offers cable cars and lifts capable of transporting more than 2,000 skiers a day with minimal queuing. montenegro.travel

✳ **Getting There:** An hour's drive from Podgorica Airport

✳ **Equipment hire:** In-house ski shop and rental at Bianca Resort (see below)

✳ **Stay:** The cute, cosy, four-star Bianca mountain resort (biancaresort.com) in 25 acres of pine forest in Kolašin

Åre, Sweden



Like its Scandinavian neighbour, Sweden offers huge scope for skiing in open, unspoilt landscapes. One of the top destinations is Åre, which hosted the World Ski Championships in 2007. It's well equipped, with an extensive lift system connecting 103 runs (six black), some of which are floodlit at night. Åre is actually three different resorts: Åre Village, good for competent skiers and good nightlife; Åre Björnen, better for families; and Duved-Tegefjäll, which offers amazing scenery. Ski through forests, tuck into a reindeer steak, admire incredible sunsets or take a zip-wire across the frozen landscape – skiing here offers something different and slightly more wild than many of the more traditional resorts. And then there's the excellent social scene – this is Sweden, after all... visitsweden.com

✳ **Getting There:** Coach transfer from Östersund to Åre with Skybus (skybus.se)

✳ **Equipment hire:** Skistar (skistar.com) can organise the ski school, equipment and even accommodation

✳ **Stay:** Ski in, ski out from the stylish Tott Hotel (tottare.com)

Mzaar, Lebanon



How about skiing in the morning and sunbathing in the afternoon? Mzaar in Lebanon is just 45 minutes from Beirut, making it perfectly possible to swap your

boots for a bikini should the mood take you. Elevation of up to 2,465m means excellent snow coverage from December to April, and 80km of runs cater for all levels. Very competent skiers might be a little disappointed by the small number of difficult descents – however, there are plenty of guides willing to show you some seriously cool off-piste spots. Lifts close earlyish, but the queues are tiny so you'll have had your fill of activity during the day and be ready to settle down to some shisha on the slopes, enjoying the weekend's social whirl or the more mellow weekday scene. skilebanon.co.uk

✳ **Getting there:** 45 minutes drive from Beirut

✳ **Equipment hire:** Lots of hire shops throughout Mzaar and Faraya village

✳ **Stay:** Family-friendly and world-class accommodation at Intercontinental Resort & Spa, Mzaar (ichotelsgroup.com)

Gulmarg, Kashmir



If Europe and the Middle East just aren't wild enough, get your ski fix further afield on the snow-covered mountains of the Himalayas. Gulmarg is paradise for adventurous skiers and snowboarders, with deep powder on long off-piste runs. However, seasonal beginner slopes are considerably less inspiring. It's probably not the best family destination, as there is still a military presence at Srinagar Airport, and travel to the area is not recommended by the UK Foreign Office. However, once you reach the slopes, any tension melts away and the result is a relaxed and unusual ski resort with excellent terrain for competent skiers. Head up to the gondola's upper station (at 4,200m it's the highest gondola in the northern hemisphere) for extreme views over the Himalayan horizon. jktourism.org

✳ **Getting there:** Fly to Srinagar via Delhi. A pre-booked taxi is the best way to travel the 40km to Gulmarg

✳ **Equipment hire:** Kashmir Alpine Ski Shop (+91 1954 254 638, kashmiralpine.com) can also organise guides

✳ **Stay:** Colonial charm 100m from the end of the run at Hotel Highlands Park (+91 1954 254 430)