

# Skiing on a shoestring

Families can hit the slopes on Christmas Day for less than you might expect – all that agents need is a little creativity, finds **Alice Barnes-Brown**

**T**he cold of the mountains may bite, but the cost-of-living crisis doesn't have to. A Club Med survey revealed in October that skiers were spending an average of £1,580 per person on their ski holidays this winter – down £399 from the previous year. Skiers may be more cautious with their spending, but they're still keen to get some snow-based action.

The Christmas holidays are a superb time to go skiing – school's out, the snow is reliable, and the air is full of festive cheer – but it can be costlier than in term-time. However, it is possible to find week-long trips over Christmas costing less than £2,750 for a family of four; it just requires thinking outside the box...

## BUDGET FOR BULGARIA

**Best for:** Seasoned skiers

Bulgaria's top ski resort, Bansko, sits at the foot of the Pirin Mountains, which are transformed into a snow-covered wonderland every winter, with 75km

of marked pistes. A 20-minute gondola ride takes clients from the heart of town, over the cone-shaped hills to the ski area, where both a blue and black run can take skiers of varying abilities straight back down. Snow machines located across the slopes guarantee full coverage, even in warmer months.

After a day on the slopes, evenings in Bansko are refreshingly relaxed: families can visit a stone-built *mehana* for taverna-style hospitality and wallet-friendly good food (three-course meals in restaurants like these average around £15), plus there's a bowling centre open until 11 pm.

**Book it:** Balkan Holidays offers seven nights' self-catering in the three-star Apartments Winslow Elegance (which has a kids' playground), departing on December 23, from £1,854 for a family of four sharing. This includes flights from Gatwick, luggage and return transfers. [balkanholidays.co.uk](http://balkanholidays.co.uk) ➤

Bansko, Bulgaria  
PICTURE Shutterstock /  
Nataliya Nazarova



# DESTINATIONS

## FAMILY HOLIDAYS | CHRISTMAS SKI TRIPS

### ASK THE experts



"With the cost-of-living crisis, skiers want resorts that offer great value for money holidays and ski services. This is where Bansko and Borovets, the two main ski resorts in Bulgaria, score so highly because ski packs and lift passes here cost much less than in other ski resorts. Bulgaria is also renowned for its low cost of living, so customers won't break the bank while in the resort."

**Lynsey Jones, national sales manager, Balkan Holidays**



"For skiing at Christmas, we find the best pitch for staying in a chalet is that the host will take care of cooking and cleaning. Plus, clients can ski on Christmas Day, and experience markets and parades. Our chalet Christmases include flights, transfers, seven nights' accommodation and hosted catering."

**Miles Porter, sales and operations manager, Skiworld**



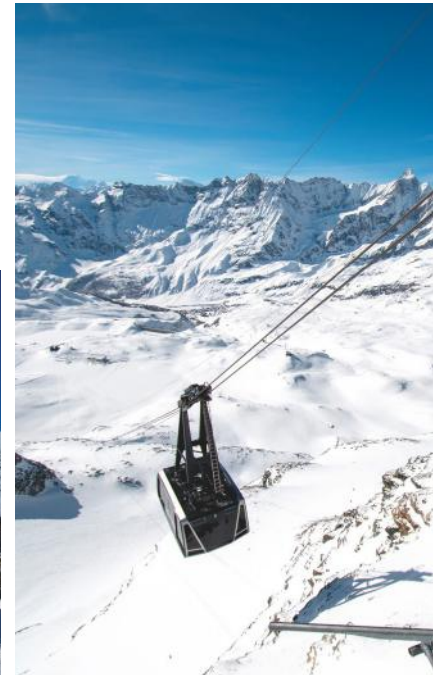
"Destinations such as Andorra, Spain, Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina all demonstrate value for money in terms of the holiday package prices and the cost of lift passes. Where possible, booking early gives customers more choice on resort and accommodation availability, and there are often deals to be taken advantage of."

**David Smith, business development manager, Crystal Ski**



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Bjelašnica, Bosnia and Herzegovina; Aosta Valley, Italy; Multi Residences 1650, France

PICTURES: Shutterstock/Photokanto, Tatsuo Nakamura



### FABULOUS FRANCE

**Best for:** Year-round snow

High-altitude Les Deux Alpes boasts Europe's longest glacier for skiing, with smooth, gently sloping runs perfect for smaller skis. Plus, if clients can't make it out for the Christmas holidays, the glacier is ski-able year-round.

At the ski area's summit, there's a revamped ice cave containing ethereal animal sculptures, a family-friendly restaurant with views across to Mont Blanc, and an incredible viewpoint that appears to hang over a steep drop into the impenetrable Alps. Ski passes here are flexible, with half-day options available. Add extra value by telling clients they can save up to €80 by buying a week's ski pass for the whole family.

**Book it:** Skiworld offers seven nights' self catering at Multi Residences 1650 for £2,138 for a family of four, including transfers and flights from Heathrow on December 23. [skiworld.co.uk](http://skiworld.co.uk)

### DIME-SAVING DINARICS

**Best for:** Beginners

Above the clouds in the Dinaric Alps is Bjelašnica, Bosnia and Herzegovina's highest ski area. The area rose to prominence in 1984 when it hosted the men's Alpine skiing at the Winter Olympics. An extensive redevelopment of the ski centre in 2017 has turned Bjelašnica into a thoroughly modern ski resort, ideal for total beginners with its expansive nursery slopes.

It's also easily accessible, at just an hour's drive from the nearest airport, Sarajevo. There are a handful

of hotels, including wellness-oriented Hotel Monti at the end of the sledging slope – the hotel's Six Sense Spa has a lengthy treatment menu and warming infrared cabin, perfect for soothing tired muscles.

**Book it:** Crystal Ski offers seven nights' half board at Hotel Monti from £556 per person, based on four sharing, including flights from Gatwick on December 24, plus transfers and luggage. [crystalski.co.uk](http://crystalski.co.uk)

### CASH-CONSCIOUS ITALY

**Best for:** Foodie families

Cervinia, in Italy's scenic Aosta Valley, is home to one of Europe's best-value ski resorts. There are 30 blue pistes, well suited to beginner and intermediate parents and kids, with the option to ski down either back into the Italian resort or postcard-perfect Zermatt (across the border in Switzerland). A revolutionary new cableway connecting the two resorts opened in May, and at points dangles one mile over a glacier. If the pistes doesn't appeal, Cervinia also has a cool snowpark where older kids and teens can showcase their freestyle moves on the ramps.

For afters, clients can wander a traffic-free main street lined with pubs and shops, enjoy delicious Italian pastas and wood-fired pizzas and try out the ice-karting course.

**Book it:** Inghams has a seven-night self-catering package at the Base Camp Apartments, including flights and transfers departing on December 24, for £666 per person, based on a family of four sharing. [ingham.co.uk](http://ingham.co.uk) **TW**