

ASK THE OPERATOR

Ski resorts were among the first to be hit by Covid-19, so how can you rebuild confidence in snow-based breaks? **Laura French** finds out



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1 Ski Trips

Chris joined Tui UK & Ireland in 2009, leading various teams before becoming managing director for Crystal Ski Holidays in 2016. He has always been a keen skier and spent a season in the Three Valleys before joining Accenture, then eventually moving back into travel.



Chris Logan,
managing director, Crystal Ski Holidays

It's natural that customers might feel anxious about booking a ski holiday, so providing reassurance has never been more important. Highlight the benefits of booking with a trusted operator, such as having access to expert advice around the clock, and knowing where's safe and where's not. At Crystal Ski, we'll contact customers and let them amend or cancel for free if the Foreign Office advice changes or if local restrictions mean skiers can't get onto the mountains.

It's also worth looking at what other flexible booking policies operators have put in place. Customers due to go on holiday with us who are diagnosed with Covid-19, have symptoms or are asked to self-isolate can submit a medical certificate to amend bookings for free, for example. Anyone impacted by a local UK lockdown can also amend or cancel. These are plus points for clients concerned about navigating the nitty-gritty of individual destinations, airlines and resorts at an unpredictable time.

In terms of general advice, make sure clients get good travel insurance and read the small print so they understand exactly what's covered. We'd also recommend booking a package, from equipment hire through to lessons, so clients have one point of contact for the whole trip and can budget it all in from the start.

2 Lapland

Dino has spent 39 years in the travel industry and joined Transun in 2018 to strengthen the operator's agent following. He loves the range of Arctic experiences in Lapland and never gets bored of seeing the northern lights, taking huskies out or riding snowmobiles.



Dino Toouli,
head of trade relations, Transun

Product knowledge will be key to selling Lapland holidays with confidence. Tourism is still relatively new to Lapland and it's a vast region, so the variations and differences in available product can be huge.

In terms of Covid protocols, resorts and hotels will be putting in place different safety and hygiene measures. Clients might be concerned these measures could compromise the enjoyment of their holiday, but reassure them that we're working to ensure every visit to Lapland remains magical.

Encourage customers to book now to take advantage of offers. There are still a limited number of free and half-price child places available on our Santa trips, which are a great alternative holiday for families who've been left disappointed by disrupted travel in the summer.

Don't limit Lapland just to families, though – there's so much to do: husky sledding, snowmobiling, ice-fishing, snowshoeing and staying a night in an igloo are a few of the activities that appeal to those travelling without children. Clients won't be surrounded by hordes of people. We operate in a remote location in the northwest region of Finland away from mass-market city resorts.

3 Winter Sports

As managing director for the UK and Northern Europe, Estelle is responsible for developing Club Med's business growth and digital focus, working with digital data and artificial intelligence to identify shifting consumer behaviour. She joined the company eight years ago.



Estelle Giraudeau,
managing director for UK and northern Europe, Club Med

The memories of the past winter might still be fresh in customers' minds, but tour operators have worked hard to adapt their offering, so use these measures to allay concerns and emphasise the other plus points of being in a resort – such as having staff on hand 24/7 and doctors or nurses on site.

Spread the net wide when you're selling; winter sports trips aren't just for skiers, with a whole range of activities on offer. For example, we offer guided snowshoeing at resorts including Alpe d'Huez, Les Arcs Panorama and the new La Rosière, and guests can enjoy activities such as dog sledding at our Pragalato resort in Italy and bobsledding at our La Plagne resort in France.

When it comes to getting in sales now, highlight early-booking deals – we offer up to 15% off – and remind clients they'll have a greater choice of accommodation if they get in there sooner rather than later.

Also look for operators with comprehensive Covid cover. We will cover all medical expenses if a guest contracts the virus while travelling with us, up until April 30, 2021, and if clients can't travel due to Covid, we'll offer a full refund.

Lastly, don't let fears around flying put clients off; many winter sports destinations can be reached by train or car.