

# Piste to powder

Laura French ventures off-piste on a trip to Italy's best-kept Alpine secret, Cervinia

@laurafrench121

**B**uckling up my 'ABS' backpack, transceiver concealed surreptitiously beneath my ski jacket and airbag toggle slung over my shoulder, I feel a little like James Bond off on a secret mission in the Alps.

That's until I fly off the chairlift 20 minutes later and go hurtling headfirst into the face of our guide Andreas, who starts to look a little more concerned about the

prospect of us venturing off-piste as per the plan.

Admittedly, by this point I feel ever-so-slightly more Bridget Jones than James Bond, but I'm not going to let it stop me, and after a few haphazard runs, I start to find my ski legs again. It's time to hit the powder.

## ▶ OFF-PISTE

I was on a ski trip with Inghams in Cervinia, a small and relatively quiet winter resort in northern Italy, set at the foot of the Matterhorn, which dominates

the village with its gloriously snow-speckled, jagged peak. And I was determined to master this challenging art.

Our introductory session began with a briefing on how to use our flashing transceivers – a small beeping device used to help skiers find each other in the event of an avalanche – and ended with a warning not to accidentally nudge the toggle to our left “especially on a chairlift, because the airbag might inflate”. Cue visions of me blowing up balloon-like several hundred feet over the Italian Alps.

Fortunately that didn't happen, and I soon realised what all the

fuss was about when I ventured off-piste the following day with the group and found myself gliding through some of the deepest, freshest, softest powder I've ever come across. It felt like skiing through fairy dust, snow sparkling underfoot and sun glaring up above from a sky so blue you'd be forgiven for thinking you could swim in it.

At other points, the snow was a little icier, with all four of us toppling over with comically elephantine gestures that would have made Tinky Winky



## TOP TIP

Find out more about Cervinia and the Aosta Valley at [aosta-valley.co.uk](http://aosta-valley.co.uk)





look graceful, but it provided a thrill that had us screeching for several minutes, and buzzing for several hours, afterwards.

As that suggests, conditions need to be just right for off-piste skiing, so there's no guarantee clients will be able to do it - we got only an hour or so over a whole weekend - but when they can, it's sublime.

**ON-PISTE**

For those less keen on the off-piste side of things, Cervinia also has plenty of ordinary slopes. At 2,050m in altitude (and 3,480m at the top lift), the white stuff is almost guaranteed, so the season is happily long. It begins in November and lasts until early May. There's even summer skiing up on the glacier from the end of June through to late August.

The whole area is scattered with gentle blue and red runs, which makes it ideal for



**We toppled over with comically elephantine gestures that would have made Tinky Winky look graceful**

LEFT: Chalet Hotel Dragon

FAR LEFT: Lunch on the slopes

beginners and intermediates, and they're pleasingly empty compared with the larger resorts you'll find in France.

There's also a 4,000-metre-long snowpark designed for freestyle skiers and

snowboarders looking to practise their skills, alongside a good kids' offering, with nursery slopes and inflatables offering a less intense alternative to the real deal.

Cervinia is a little more limited for trickier runs, but those looking

for a bigger challenge can head over to Zermatt, set on the Swiss side. Getting there involves various scenic gondola trips and peaceful runs along quiet, snow-covered roads, and there are several routes available - from

an easy, flat and happily tranquil blue to a steeper, significantly more adrenaline-pumping black.

Both are surrounded by the same jaw-dropping scenery: endless layers of white-washed mountains and Christmas card-worthy pine trees, which pretty much sums up the whole region. And those who tire of skiing once they get to the Zermatt side can hop on a scenic train for picture-perfect views and a well-deserved sit-down.

On that note, there are plenty of mountainside cafes and restaurants dotted around for those in need of a rest. My favourite was Chalet Etoile, a huge quintessentially Alpine hut on the Cervinia side, where Scandinavian meets local Italian: think reindeer tagliatelle, giant langoustines and seafood ravioli served in a satisfyingly thick sauce that tasted all the better after a morning on the slopes.

**STAY**

Back in the town itself, the vibe is relaxed and relatively quiet. It skews towards older groups and occasional families rather than party animals, with traditional restaurants, souvenir shops and quaint bars serving indulgent espresso martinis and g n pi - a herbal liqueur native to the Alps.

We stayed at Chalet Hotel Dragon, a three-and-a-half-diamond hotel exclusive to Inghams, with 12 rooms and a lively pub downstairs. The bar does mean it can get a little noisy at night with loud music, but for older groups (it's not suitable for children under 12) wanting a bit of low-key apr s-ski, it's a good suggestion. There's a weekly schedule of evening activities, from bar crawls to pub quizzes, and it's good value, with a daily buffet breakfast, afternoon tea and evening meal (canap s and wine included). The hotel

**Monarch's biggest ever Lapland programme on sale now**  
 Visit [Monarchagents.co.uk](http://Monarchagents.co.uk) or call 0333 777 4740

**Santa Trips - December**

**Prices from £715pp<sup>1</sup>**

Flights from Gatwick, Manchester and, **NEW for 2017, Birmingham**

3 and 4 night trips throughout December with activities included

**The Arctic Experience - January & February**

**Prices from £489pp<sup>1</sup>**

Flights from Gatwick and, **NEW for this winter, Manchester**

3 and 4 night trips in January and February with activities included

Holiday deposit only

**£59pp**

All of the Package Holidays & Cruises sold by Monarch Holidays are fully protected by the ATOL scheme (number 2275). ATOL protection is only available to flight only bookings sold by Monarch Holidays Limited (please refer to our website for full details) and excludes the holiday booked at least 30 days before departure. Full details of our ATOL protection can be found on our website. <sup>1</sup> Prices based on 7 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>2</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>3</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>4</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>5</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>6</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>7</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>8</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>9</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>10</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>11</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>12</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>13</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>14</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>15</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>16</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>17</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>18</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>19</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>20</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>21</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>22</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>23</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>24</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>25</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>26</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>27</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>28</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>29</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>30</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>31</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>32</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>33</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>34</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>35</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>36</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>37</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>38</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>39</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>40</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>41</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>42</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>43</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>44</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>45</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>46</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>47</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>48</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>49</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>50</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>51</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>52</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>53</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>54</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>55</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>56</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>57</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>58</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>59</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>60</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>61</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>62</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>63</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>64</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>65</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>66</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>67</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>68</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>69</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>70</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>71</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>72</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>73</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>74</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>75</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>76</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>77</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>78</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>79</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>80</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>81</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>82</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>83</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>84</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>85</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>86</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>87</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>88</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>89</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>90</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>91</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>92</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>93</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>94</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>95</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>96</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>97</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>98</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>99</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room. <sup>100</sup> Prices based on 2 adults sharing a room in a double room.

*Live Every Moment*

**Winter 17/18 on sale now**

- New agent portal - easy online bookings
- 91 leading resorts across 8 countries
- Flights from 21 UK airports
- Snow train options available to France
- Expert assistance
- Groups - up to 1 in 6 go free
- Best ski deals

For more information  
 Visit [agents.inghams.co.uk](http://agents.inghams.co.uk)  
 Call 01483 345 118

**PRICE PARITY 100% TRADE FRIENDLY**

**GLOBE TRAVEL AWARDS WINNER 2016 AND 2017**

**OVER 80 YEARS EXPERIENCE**

**ABTA** Travel with Confidence



**RIGHT:**  
Skiing in the  
Aosta Valley

**BELOW:**  
Cervinia



## Off-piste ski resorts

Louise Newton, Inghams' group head of marketing, recommends her favourite resorts for off-piste action

**Les Deux Alpes, France:** Ideal for all levels of skier and snowboarder, Les Deux Alpes offers high-altitude skiing with magnificent scenery from the top of the glacier. Skiers can also link up to La Grave, a famous off-piste ski area nearby.

**Arlberg, Austria (St Anton, St Christoph, Lech and Zurs):** Known as 'the birthplace of skiing', Arlberg is the largest inter-linked ski area in Austria, offering more than 125 miles of marked off-piste routes.

**Verbier, Switzerland:** Spanning four valleys, Verbier is famed for some of the best lift-accessible off-piste skiing in Europe. Its highest peak, Mont Fort, is the freeride capital of Europe, and every March the resort hosts Xtreme Verbier, the finals of the Freeride World Tour.

**Champoluc, Italy:** Unspoilt Champoluc, in the Monterosa ski area, is a haven for those looking to take their skiing and snowboarding off the beaten path, and is especially suited to advanced skiers and snowboarders.

PICTURES: ENRICO ROMANZI; DON WALES PHOTOGRAPHY

## 4 TIPS FOR GOING OFF-PISTE

Skiers and snowboarders need to be of an advanced level to venture off-piste

Check weather conditions and hire a transceiver, shovel and probe before setting off

Opt for wide powder skis to stay above the snow

Ski with an experienced guide and take avalanche training before heading out

is also handily located right by the slopes, with the nearest chairlift a five-minute walk away.

For a higher-end option, suggest the four-star Punta Maquignaz, an Alpine-style chalet decked out with wood-panelled rooms, antique furnishings and hunting trophies. There's also a cocktail bar, à la carte restaurant and spa, so clients who'd rather lie down for a massage than carve their way through the powder can do just that – not that they'll want to, if they manage to master this whole off-piste thing.



**Endless layers of white-washed mountains and Christmas card-worthy pine trees pretty much sum up the whole region**

**Book it:** Seven nights at Xtra Chalet Dragon in Cervinia, Italy, costs from £789 in January 2018, with Inghams. The price includes buffet breakfasts, afternoon tea and five-course evening meals with wine for six days, plus flights to Turin and transfers. Ski and snowboard tuition can be pre-booked for three or six half-days from £123, and off-piste tuition can be booked locally from €320 for up to two people for a day, including a guide (lift pass and safety equipment cost extra). [inghams.co.uk/ski-holidays](http://inghams.co.uk/ski-holidays)

