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Ten great mini-ski breaks



Take a weekend skiing trip Getty Images

Ben Clatworthy

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Samoëns, France

The French describe Samoëns — just an hour's drive from Geneva airport — as one of their *monuments historiques*. Small artisan shops line the main street and the square is archetypal historic France. So you get a dose of real France and some great skiing in one weekend. Linked to the vast Grand Massif ski domain, which consists of five separate resorts, Samoëns has access to 265km of slopes, of which 80 per cent are north-facing, so they retain their snow even when the weather warms.

Details Three nights' half-board at the three-star Hôtel Neige et Roc is from £363pp, based on two sharing (0844 5760123, peakretreats.co.uk). EasyJet returns to Geneva are from about £65

Chamonix, France

Famed for being home to some of the best off-piste in the world, including the much-fêted Vallée Blanche, Chamonix is a haven for weekend warriors and is just an hour's transfer from Geneva. Once the clouds disperse after a big snowfall — revealing Mont Blanc towering above — there are few resorts in the world where the prospect of power skiing is so exciting. There is a good mix of steep skiing for experts and gentler slopes for intermediates.

Details Three nights' B&B with Ski Weekend is from £439pp, including transfers (01392 878353, skiweekend.com). Swiss (swiss.com) return flights to Geneva are from £65

Obertauern, Austria

Obertauern is far from the most attractive Austrian resort, but its proximity to Salzburg (just an hour's drive away) makes it a good option for weekend skiing. Thanks to its situation at the head of the Tauern pass, it's possible to ski a full 360-degree route around the resort — with a little help from bridges over the main road. There is a high route for experts, while others can opt for the easier lower circuit.

Details Three nights' half-board at the four-star Hotel Marietta is from €360pp (00 43 6456 7262, marietta.at). BA (ba.com) has returns to Salzburg from £99

Vaujany, France

Lift-linked to the vast Alpe d'Huez ski area, Vaujany offers a retreat from the crowds attracted by major ski resorts. It's a 55-minute transfer from the airport at Grenoble (to which BA began flights last December from Gatwick). You can hop on the two-stage cable car to access the main ski area, or instead opt to stay and ski the resort's local pistes, which are served by a small network of lifts. The amenities in the village have improved in recent years with the opening of a new leisure centre that has a swimming pool, bowling, and ice skating.

Details Three nights' half-board at Chalet Saskia is from £590pp including flights and transfers for a minimum group of four people (01428 608070, skipeak.net)

Cairngorm Mountain, Scotland

Skiers often muse on the unpredictable snowfall, sketchy weather and limited terrain that skiing in Scotland offers. But if you cast aside these preconceptions, Scotland offers a very attractive option for a weekend skiing break, often at the fraction of the price of the continental alternatives. On a sunny day the scenery is stunning at Cairngorm Mountain, which has 11 lifts and 30km of mainly easy slopes. Many visitors opt to stay at nearby Aviemore, which has a shuttle bus to transfer you to Cairngorm Mountain.

Details B&B doubles at the three-star Cairngorm Hotel are from £104 (01479 810233, www.cairngorm.com). EasyJet returns flights from London to Inverness are from about £62

St Anton, Austria

If you're looking for a weekend that leaves you craving a week of early nights to recover, head to the party town of St Anton. It's a resort that features highly on most advanced skiers' bucket list for its hair-raising descents, but also has plenty on offer for those not wishing to bust a gut. Nearby Lech, home to countless glitzy chalets (including Chalet N, one of the world's most expensive bolt holes), has some wonderfully gentle slopes, perfect for those wishing to cruise about looking swish. Après-ski in St Anton starts on the slopes at the acclaimed MooserWirt, before continuing long into the night in town. The resort is about a 40-minute transfer from Innsbruck airport.

Details B&B doubles at Ski Hotel Galzing are from €184 (00 43 5446 42770, skihotelgalzig.at). BA (ba.com) has return flights to Innsbruck from £99

La Clusaz, France

This traditional French resort has managed what other resorts so often fail to: it has retained its alpine charm, despite having vastly expanded from its roots. The slopes are largely suited to beginner and intermediate skiers, although experts can get their thrills by heading off-piste — and there is stacks of it to be explored. The catch, however, is the altitude. The resort sits at a lowly 1,100m, so it's recommended to book late, when you know the snow is good, to reap the full rewards of the area. From Geneva it's a one-hour drive.

Details Three nights' half-board at the four-star Hotel Beauregard costs from £779pp including flights and transfers (02380 206971, skiweekends.com)

Les Gets, France

Just one hour from Geneva airport, the resort of Les Gets is a weekend skiing hotspot. The resort is linked to the expansive Portes du Soleil area, which boasts 650km of slopes, although the local slopes offer plenty of skiing in their own right. Snowboarders (and skiers) should head for the resort's snowboarder-cross — think jumps, bumps and rolls — which is one of the best in the Alps, and perfect for competitive families wanting a race.

Details Four nights' chalet-board at White Valley Lodge is from £595pp (07778 326708, thewhitevalleycompany.com)

Grindelwald, Switzerland

With the north face of the iconic Eiger looming over the town — a climb revered by mountaineers — Grindelwald is an inspiring place to ski. Access to Grindelwald's slopes is by train, which takes you to Kleine Scheidegg, from where you can ski to nearby Wengen. Fans of ski racing should be sure to ski the Lauberhorn course, one of the most perilous downhill races of the annual World Cup calendar. Competitors average a speed of 106km/h and take less than three minutes to reach the finish. A steadier pace is recommended.

Details Three nights' half-board at the four-star Hotel Sunstar is from £728pp including flights and rail transfers, which take about 90 minutes (01483 791114, ingham.co.uk); SkyWork has return flights from Southend to Berne from about £150.

Madesimo, Italy

Gutsy skiers can attempt to ski the three-kilometre Canalone, itinerary black piste, which descends from the top of the Groppera cable car. The top is daunting with a narrow gully, which eventually widens as you make your way down the face of the mountain. For those a little less adventurous, there are 60km of slopes, ranging from 1,550m–2,948m, while there are also a number of nursery slopes for those just starting out. The transfer is about two hours (but the skiing is worth it).

Details Three nights' half-board at the four-star Hotel Andossi is from £428pp, based on two sharing, including flights and car hire (020 7371 9111, momentumski.com)

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 Mr Duncan Platt

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