



Beginner



Intermediate



Expert



Snowboarder



Families



Groups



Après-ski



Budget

Baby powder: take the kids to Sainte Foy for a bargain ski break; below, one of Cervinia's many wide, gentle pistes; right, chalets in Méribel



Ylläs, Finland



In a nutshell The 'mountains' here might be considered little more than hills by Alpine standards, but that just adds to the appeal for beginners and families.

We love When it comes to winter sports, pointy mountains aren't *everything*, and that's especially true when you're a beginner. What you need are gentle slopes, friendly, English-speaking instructors, and lots of things to do between lessons. Ylläs has all three in abundance – including more than 300km of cross-country ski trails. And what it lacks in top-of-the-mountain scenery, it makes up for in edge-of-the-world atmosphere.

We don't love A bit more daylight would be nice. Save your visit for the second half of the season, in March and April, to avoid the endless nights of an Arctic winter.

Get there Ski Lapland (020 7199 6012, ski-lapland.co.uk) has one week at the ski-in, ski-out Saaga Hotel from £898pp, B&B, including flights from Heathrow to Kittila, and transfers; yllas.fi/en.

Sainte Foy, France



In a nutshell Sainte Foy has magnificent skiing at a fraction of the price (and the queuing) of its famous neighbours, Tignes and Val d'Isère.

We love Cute, cut-price and clad throughout in traditional Savoie-style wood-and-stone, Sainte Foy may have only 30-odd kilometres of pistes, but that keeps the prices down, and also those 30-odd kilometres include a magic carpet and beginner slope right in front of the village cafes, as well as a stunning blue/green run winding more than 900 vertical metres

down to the village – perhaps the best summit-to-resort beginners' run in Europe. As for its off-piste – Tignes' expert ski instructors head here on their days off. Enough said.

We don't love Its low-ish altitude (2,620m) means Sainte Foy can't be risky for early and late-season skiing as it doesn't get as much snow as the higher resorts, leading to slushy or patchy slopes.

Get there Alpine Elements (020 3642 4065, alpineelements.co.uk) has one week in Sainte Foy from £750pp, half board, including flights from Gatwick to Geneva, transfers and lift pass; saintefoy-tarentaise.com.

Cervinia, Italy



In a nutshell Gentle blues and wide learners' slopes right by the village and make this a joy for new skiers – with bonus access to neighbouring Zermatt for more confident piste-bashers.

We love Though the imposing jagged crown of the Matterhorn looms above Cervinia, its pistes are anything but intimidating, from the spacious nursery slopes to the wide blue runs near the top. The clincher? One of the Alps' most renowned slopeside restaurants, Chalet Etoile (00 39 0166 940220; mains around £18)

is on a blue, so you can warm up with what is reputedly the Alps' best tomato soup before tackling the run back to the village. Fancy a challenge? Nothing beats the smugness of bragging about conquering the mighty Matterhorn – easily done with a Zermatt-added day-pass and a few lifts up the mountain that take you over into Switzerland. **We don't love** Because it's above the treeline, it can get windy, which also means the lifts to Zermatt close a little too often.

Get there Crystal Ski (0871 231 2256, crystalski.co.uk) has one week in Cervinia from £599pp, half board, including flights from Gatwick to Turin and transfers; cervinia.it.

Méribel, France



In a nutshell Intermediate or expert, you can't argue with the location, slap-bang in the middle of the world's largest properly connected system of lifts and pistes.

We love Whatever the weather, however good or iffy the snow, there's always somewhere scintillating to ski and board in The Three Valleys. Mild and sunny? Head to the snowsure slopes of Val Thorens, at 2,300m the highest ski station in Europe. Blowing a blizzard? Then stick to the sheltered, tree-lined pistes around Méribel or branch out in La Tania. Wherever

you go, you'll find a good mix of groomed runs and demanding off-piste. Lunch could be a burger at Mottaret or a Michelin-starred meal at La Bouitte in St Marcel de Belleville. At the end of the day, kick back on the sunny terrace of the Allodis hotel and savour the valley views. **We don't love** The lift queues can be a drag, especially in February. Avoid the morning rush by starting your day on the less-busy chairlifts on the Tournette side of the valley.

Get there Fish&Pips (0845 474 1054, fishandpips.co.uk) has seven nights in Méribel from £700pp, half board, excluding flights. BA (0844 493 0787, ba.com) flies from Heathrow to Geneva from £121 return; meribel.net. >