

# Book early (or late), go self-catered and pick a resort in Bulgaria! How a week's skiing can cost less than £500

- One secret to having a cheaper ski holiday is to go early or late in the season
- 'Cheap' ski clothes can be picked up from stores such as Aldi and Decathlon
- Self-catered apartments are usually cheaper than hotels or catered chalets

By **ANDREW DICKENS FOR THE DAILY MAIL**  
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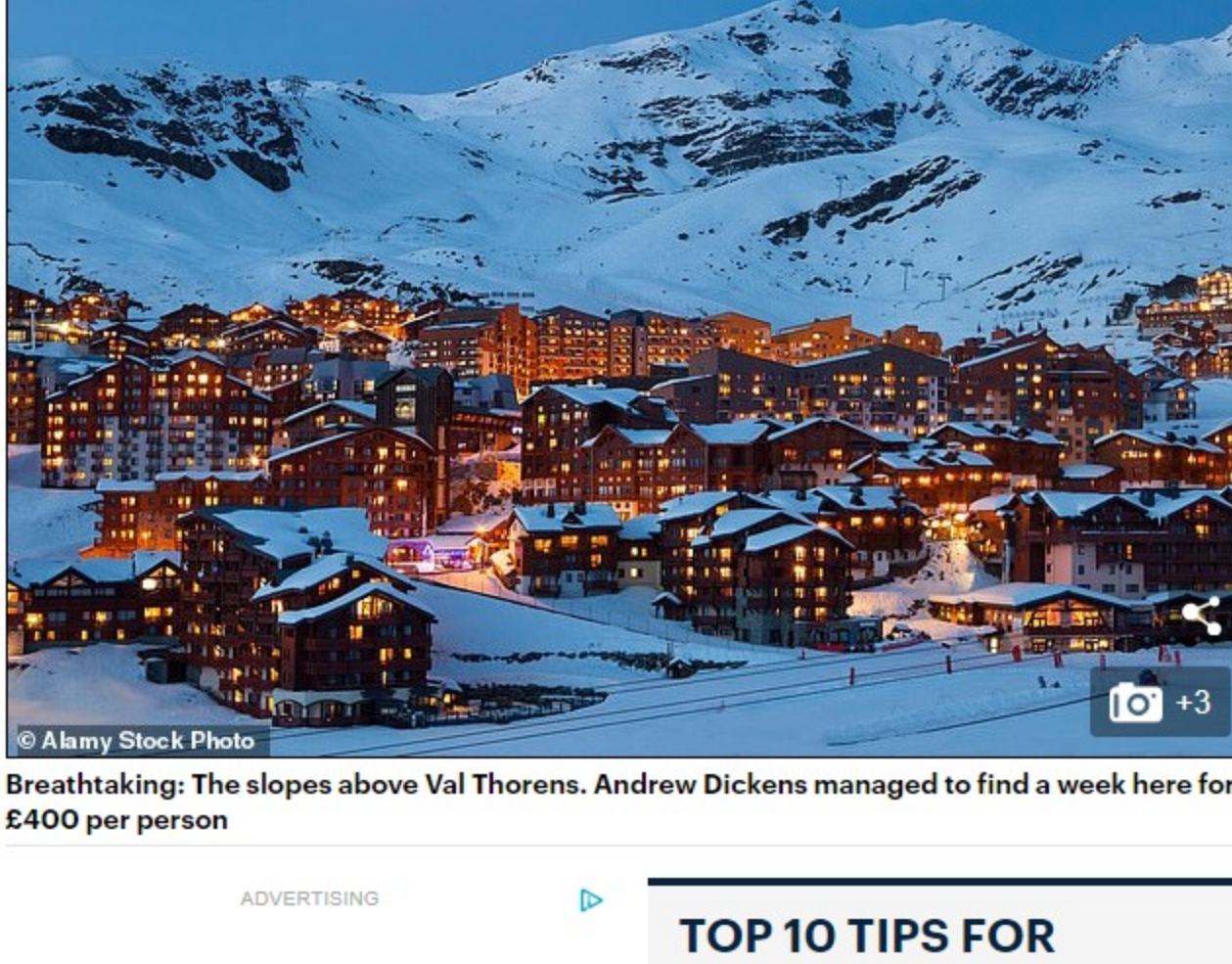
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There are three things that put people off ski holidays: fear of physical pain, fear of not being very good . . . and fear of seeing their bank balance melt like snow in the Sahara.

The first two apply to those who have never tried skiing, but the third is universal and not irrational. It all adds up: travel, accommodation, lift pass, clothing and, because skiing without skis is tricky, equipment.

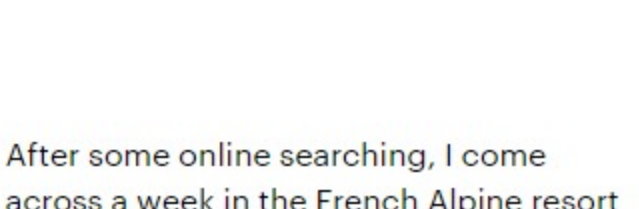
However, there are ways to do it on the cheap. Look hard and you can get all the above for under £500. But can a budget ski trip really be any good? The proof of the fondue is in the tasting...

## KITTING OUT



Breathtaking: The slopes above Val Thorens. Andrew Dickens managed to find a week here for £400 per person

ADVERTISING



After some online searching, I come across a week in the French Alpine resort of Val Thorens for £400 per person through a company called **WeSki**.

The trip includes return flights to Geneva, car hire, accommodation, equipment hire and lift pass. The flights are easyJet, with hand-luggage only, but this is doable, especially if you wear bulkier items to travel.

After signing on the dotted line, the matter of what to wear is easily dealt with: I manage to buy all the essential ski clothes from Decathlon and Aldi for a bargain £82.93.

On arrival in Geneva, I head straight to the Avis desk and receive the keys to an Opel Crosslander, complete with winter tyres, which carries me on a scenic, three-hour drive to Val Thorens.

## SETTLING IN

Arriving in darkness, I check in to my accommodation: a complex of basic, self-catered apartments called Le Cheval Blanc. If you're after log fires, bearskin rugs and a butler serving vin chaud, this isn't for you; they are 'functional'.

There is a small living room/kitchen, a bathroom with a little tub and shower, a separate loo and a twin room. Down the hall is a ski room opening on to the slopes, where each apartment has a code-locked cupboard.

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Bag dumped, I head 30 yards up the road to collect my lift pass. It's another 40 yards to the ski hire shop, where the basic gear is ideal for beginners (better skiers can upgrade skis and boots for a few euros).

The one part of this trip I never doubted was Val Thorens itself. The highest ski resort in Europe, it has all the restaurants and shops you could need (I stick to the mini-markets to save on eating out), surrounded by 68 super ski runs. Smaller resorts may cost less, and are fine for beginners, but have their limits. 'VT' is predictably good.

## BEST VALUE?



One secret to a cheaper ski holiday is to go early or late in the season — the least likely times to find snow

What isn't predictably good, bad or average is the weather. One secret to a cheaper ski holiday is to go early or late in the season — the least likely times to find snow (somewhat key to skiing).

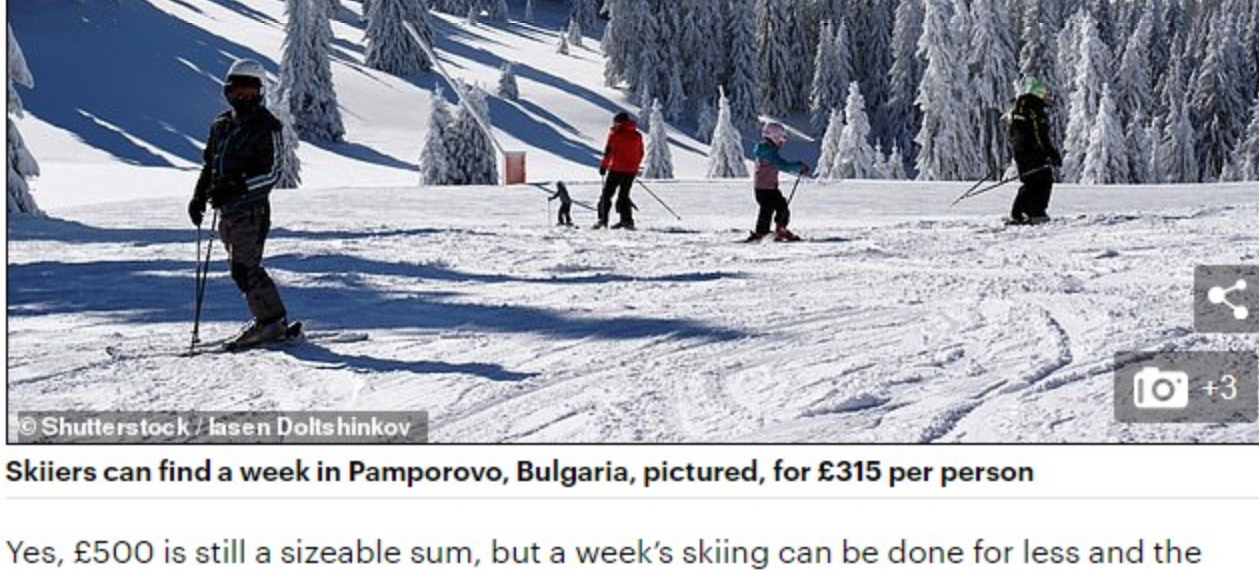
I am here in November, and half of the resort's lifts and runs have closed because of a mighty storm that blew the snow off the mountain last weekend. But what's left is bathed in sunshine: perfect conditions.

My 'cheap' ski clothes prove absolutely fine. The jacket (£19.99) and thermal base layers (£7.99 each) are from Aldi. The trousers (£19.99), fleece (£11.99), goggles (£12.99), gloves (£3.99) and socks (£4.99) are from Decathlon.

I'm not worried about label snobbery — German and French skiers wear these brands all the time — but I am worried about getting cold and wet.

As it is, I am kept warm and dry. The quality is surprisingly good.

Whether you are a curious non-skier, a rusty once-skier, or even a regular looking to squeeze in an extra week each season, you won't be wasting any money with a trip such as this.



Skiers can find a week in Pamporovo, Bulgaria, pictured, for £315 per person

Yes, £500 is still a sizeable sum, but a week's skiing can be done for less and the experience — especially if you discover a love of skiing — can be priceless...

- About a ten-minute walk from the ski lifts, Hotel I Larici in Bardonecchia, Italy, costs from £329 pp with Gatwick-Turin flights, transfers and breakfasts ([igluski.com](#)).
- Stay half-board at Hotel Snezhanka, overlooking a forest in Pamporovo, Bulgaria, from £315 pp, with Birmingham-Sofia flights and transfers ([crystalski.co.uk](#)).
- The Plagne Lauze Apartments in La Plagne, France, cost from £367 pp with Gatwick-Geneva flights ([inghams.co.uk](#)).
- Chalet Cicero is a lovely chalet above Les Arcs in France from £439 pp, including Stansted-Grenoble flights, transfers and 'chalet board' ([skiworld.co.uk](#)).
- Résidence Les Deux Alpes Champamé is a self-catering apartment in Les Deux Alpes, France, priced from £487 pp with Luton-Grenoble flights, transfers and lift passes ([sunweb.co.uk](#)).

Prices for seven nights in January, based on two sharing. Also try [peakretreats.co.uk](#), [balkanholidays.co.uk](#), [rocketski.com](#), [skisolutions.com](#).

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