

**P I N K S N O W; THE LATEST FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF WINTER SPORTS ; PINK SNOW 2019- The FT's round-up of news from the mountains, plus solo ski touring (p6), the ultimate Arctic escape (p10) - and the best aprÈs-ski boots (p14)**

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## **Body**

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[www.ft.com/pinksnow](http://www.ft.com/pinksnow) WINTER 2019/20 Méribel, France Best for: skiers eager to clock up huge mileage, a blissful retreat and a chic new hotel Méribel sits in the central valley of the three that make up the world's biggest linked ski area, Les Trois Vallées. That means it has rapid access to some 600km of pistes, from gentle forest trails to testing high-altitude black runs - bliss for intermediate and advanced skiers. The drawback is that it can feel a bit too central. In peak weeks the resort, which was co-founded by an ex-Etonian colonel, is packed full of partying Brits (the two pillars of the social scene are Le Pub and Le Rond Point - literally, the roundabout - and for many years there was a branch of Pizza Express).

This winter, though, brings a very different way of skiing Méribel. In a forest clearing up on the mountainside, about 4km from the resort centre, an old mountain refuge for hikers has been reinvented as a luxury retreat. The Refuge de la Traye has just seven bedrooms, spread across two chalets, plus two mazots (the tiny mini-chalets traditionally used to store valuables), each now converted into chocolatebox accommodation for up to four (close) friends. There's also a restaurant with a large terrace and wine cellar, plus a spa offering milk baths and hay beds, a sauna, hammam, yoga suite and outdoor Jacuzzi. Close by stands the minute but exquisitely painted Chapelle Saint-Bernard, and there are donkeys, sheep and goats that children can feed.

Peace is guaranteed: in winter, the only way to get here is on skis (off-piste from the Olympic lift, or ski touring up from the hamlet of Les Allues), by snowmobile or in the Refuge's tracked Venturi Antarctica vehicle (above).

Meanwhile, for those who would rather stay close to the action, Méribel has a new fivestar hotel this winter, which seems likely to trump all others in the resort in the style stakes. Created by the French designer Pierre Yovanovitch, Le Coucou injects a quirky, modern twist into the classic Alpine design tropes. It sits beside the pistes in the Belvedere area of the village and has 55 suites and rooms, two restaurants and both indoor and outdoor pools.

Mazots cost from (EURO)318 per night for two; [www.refugedelatraye.com](http://www.refugedelatraye.com). Doubles at Le Coucou from (EURO)710, half-board; [www.lecoucoumeribel.com](http://www.lecoucoumeribel.com). Scott Dunn ( [www.scottdunn.com](http://www.scottdunn.com)) has packages Alta, Utah Best for: deep snow, rugged scenery, tradition - and luxury At the head of Little Cottonwood Canyon, less than an

## P I N K S N O W; THE LATEST FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF WINTER SPORTS ; PINK SNOW 2019- The FT's round-up of news from the mountains, plus solo ski touring (p6), t....

hour's drive from the centre of Salt Lake City, Alta was established in 1938 on the site of a former silvermining town. By the mid-1960s, five skiers' lodges had grown up, but since then little has changed.

Alta became known as the traditionalist's resort, and families would return year after year to those same five lodges, where, with few other restaurant or bar options, they would eat, socialise, read books and play board games. The resort's continuing ban on snowboarding has only cemented its conservative reputation.

So eyebrows were raised by the arrival this year of Alta's first luxury hotel. Snowpine Lodge, the oldest of all Alta's lodges, has undergone a \$50m rebuild to emerge as a grand six-storey resort-hotel, with 68 bedrooms (complete with white robes and L'Occitane products), heated outdoor pool and hot tubs, gym, a fine-dining restaurant (open to non-residents) and a ski valet to help guests off the slopes. What next, snowboarding? .

Doubles from \$329; snowpine.com; [www.alta.com](http://www.alta.com) Avoriaz, France Best for: architectural interest and great snow On a clifftop plateau, 1,800m above sea level, Avoriaz is the highest resort in the vast interlinked Portes du Soleil ski area, but would be worth a visit for architecture fans even if they never put on skis.

It was designed and built from scratch in the 1960s by a trio of up-and-coming architects under the direction of Jean Vuarnet, a former Olympic ski champion from Morzine, the closest village. They rejected both traditional chalet clichés and the grids, straight edges and concrete of modernism, and instead created a cluster of buildings with organic shapes, porthole windows and sloping sides clad in red cedar shingle to blend in with the rock faces above and below. The village is car-free, with pistes between buildings instead of roads.

It quickly became one of the Alps' most glamorous places to ski, the "St Tropez de Neige", helped by the International Fantasy Film Festival, which brought actors and directors including Steven Spielberg, David Cronenberg, David Lynch and Luc Besson.

By the mid-1990s, Avoriaz had fallen from fashion, becoming a family rather than jet-set destination, dominated by self-catering apartments. But now a renaissance seems under way, fuelled by renewed appreciation of mid-century and modernist styles.

The original hotel, the Dromonts, has already been renovated and relaunched, and this winter brings an entirely new-built hotel, designed to be in sympathy with the original architects' plans.

Under construction for the past 18 months, the four-star Mil8 is due to open on December 14, with 42 bedrooms, a restaurant and spa. The silver-grey larch facades, portholes and balconies echo those early buildings, while the interiors, designed by Atelier Obermant in Paris, "play on the contrast between curves and right angles". There's a mix of materials - warm wood, leather and wool as well as concrete and corten steel. The result is a funky "urban mountain" feel, in which Jean Vuarnet would have felt right at home.

Double rooms from (EURO)250; [www.hotelmil8.com](http://www.hotelmil8.com) Kicking Horse, Canada Best for: experts and road-trippers Last month the British Columbia tourist board issued a press release announcing what it called "the biggest terrain expansion in North America" - the opening of 660 acres of skiing at Kicking Horse resort. What it didn't mention was that, unlike most ski-resort expansions, there is no additional lift: anyone wanting to ski the new area will have to walk up from the existing Stairway to Heaven chairlift. For serious skiers this will be no deterrent - the reward is an area of steep chutes and powderfields that recently hosted the Freeride **World** Tour.

The move seems to suggest that, after years of trying to broaden its appeal, Kicking Horse is doubling down on its image as a place of pilgrimage for the hardcore. (Of its 135 marked trails, 99 are black diamond or double black diamond, the hardest designations.) It makes sense to combine it with other BC powder meccas such as Revelstoke and Fernie. Ski Safari can organise road trips that will visit all three and also include cat and heli-skiing.

See [www.kickinghorseresort.com](http://www.kickinghorseresort.com) and [www.skisafari.com](http://www.skisafari.com) Andermatt, Switzerland Best for: culture, views and varied skiing Those looking for après-ski that doesn't involve DJ Ötzi, shot skis or Jägerbombs should look to Andermatt. In June, it opened a stunning new concert hall (above) with a performance by the Berlin Philharmonic.

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Designed by London-based Studio Seilern, the £8.9m, 660-seat hall has space for a 75-piece orchestra, while a glass facade leaves it awash with natural light. The year-round concert programme is geared towards promoting rising stars, and ranges from opera and chamber music to jazz.

The hall's opening underlines just how far Andermatt has come. A decade ago it was a garrison town with a few basic hotels, ageing ski lifts and a population that was declining as the army gradually pulled out. Then Egyptian property developer Samih Sawiris began what many considered an outlandish plan, to turn Andermatt into a leading, upmarket, year-round resort.

So far SFr1.05bn (£849m) has been invested, with the centrepiece five-star hotel, The Chedi, opening in 2013. Outside the town, some SFr150m has been spent on seven new ski lifts, gradually connecting the pistes over the Oberalp Pass to the neighbouring village of Sedrun. Earlier this year a further milestone was announced - another new lift, extending the ski area still further to include the next village, little, historic Disentis, 20km as the crow flies from Andermatt.

In truth, the three villages' "connection" is not the easiest: skiers will still have to catch a train for a five-minute journey to bridge a small gap in the pistes and lifts at Sedrun. The train is included in the lift pass, though, and together the ski area now includes 180km of pistes and 33 lifts, allowing skiers to make the long forays across the high mountains. If they reach Disentis and decide they no longer have the legs to make it back, the AprÈs-Ski train is on hand to take them back, complete with a bar serving cheese and dried meats, walnut and honey pies, beer and schnapps.

See [www.andermttmusic.com](http://www.andermttmusic.com) and [skiarena.ch](http://skiarena.ch); Ski Solutions ( [www.skisolutions.com](http://www.skisolutions.com)) has packages Sälen, Sweden, and Trysil, Norway Best for: short transfer times, families and beginners A new cable car is usually as big as ski-industry news gets, but this winter two Scandinavian resorts are going one better by launching their own airport.

Scandinavian Mountains Airport is due to open on December 22, just outside the Swedish village of Rörbäcksnäs and only 5km from the Norwegian border. Privately owned and financed by 33 partner companies including the region's biggest ski-resort operator, SkiStar, and other tourism-related businesses, it will be one of the first airports in the **world** to have a remote or "virtual" air-traffic system, operated by controllers nearly 300km away in Sundsvall.

For skiers, though, the key selling point is its proximity to the slopes - the nearest pistes at Sälen are only 10 minutes' drive away, while Trysil is 40 minutes. Flying time from London is two hours and 20 minutes; SAS will operate direct flights from Heathrow throughout the ski season on Saturdays (with returns currently on sale for as little as £125), while other routes include Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö and Copenhagen.

To underline the speed from runway to piste, SkiStar is offering transfers to Sälen by dog sled (above). Each sled is pulled by 10 Alaskan huskies, carries up to four passengers and costs Skr4,995 (£421).

Sälen is Sweden's biggest ski resort, with four distinct ski areas, 90 lifts and 82km of pistes. The runs are mainly tree-lined - but they are short, with a maximum vertical drop of less than 400m, making them best suited for beginners and intermediates.

Trysil, Norway's biggest resort, has fewer lifts but more variety, with runs draped **around** the conical 1,132m Trysilfjellet peak. Though little known to anglophone skiers, Trysil also has a long ski heritage, having hosted its first downhill races in 1862.

See [scandinavianmountains.se](http://scandinavianmountains.se) and [skistar.com](http://skistar.com); for packages, try [www.skisafari.com](http://www.skisafari.com) and [www.crystalski.co.uk](http://www.crystalski.co.uk) St Anton, Austria Best for: powderhounds, party animals - and women The biggest resort in the Arlberg region has always been known for its gnarly off-piste terrain, deep powder and raucous aprÈs-ski (this was where the modern, dancin' on tables in ski boots version of it was invented). The result has been a heavy preponderance of male visitors, something that this winter both Kaluma Travel, a leading tour operator, and the village tourist board are trying to counter.

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Kaluma has a three-night all-women trip from January 12, taking over an entire chalet in the centre of the village and including ski guiding, yoga and massages, plus canapés, four-course dinners and a fully stocked (and complimentary) bar. Meanwhile, the tourist office is running "Ladies First Weeks" from January 4 until the start of February. Visiting women are given a booklet of special offers for bars, restaurants, shops and spas.

Kaluma's "Women Who Ski" trip costs from (EURO)1,100; [www.kalumatravel.co.uk](http://www.kalumatravel.co.uk).

For the tourist board's "Ladies First Weeks" see [www.stantonamarlberg.com](http://www.stantonamarlberg.com) Laax, Switzerland Best for: the eco-conscious skier Lots of resorts **around the world** buy their electricity via renewable "green tariffs", but Laax's goes much further. Its "Greenstyle" sustainability programme has been running since 2010 and the goal is to become "the **world's** first self-sufficient ski resort". Already, local hydroelectric systems and solar panels create more electricity than the resort uses, and there are plans to install a wind farm.

The resort is now working on programmes to reduce emissions from cars, public transport and the heating of buildings. Oil-based heating systems are being replaced with biomass pellet systems or ground-source heat pumps. Charging stations for e-bikes and electric cars are being installed, there's an "e-shuttle" electric taxi service, and some of the pistegrooming machines are "e-cats" (above) - diesel-electric hybrids whose emissions are 20 per cent lower than conventional machines.

See [www.flimslaax.com](http://www.flimslaax.com). Powder Byrne ( [www.powderbyrne.com](http://www.powderbyrne.com)) has packages Cortina, Italy Best for: old-school glamour The "Queen of the Dolomites" is Italy's classic ski resort - home of the country's first ski school and host of its first Olympics, in 1956. Since then its star has lost some of its lustre, with skiers tempted away by resorts with faster lifts, higher slopes and ski-in, ski-out accommodation. But a series of recently announced, high-profile events looks set to put Cortina back on the **world** stage and unlock new investment. Most important are the skiing **World** Cup Finals in March 2020, the **World** Championships in 2021 and the return of the Winter Olympics in 2026. This winter sees the old Freccia nel Cielo cable car replaced with a much faster gondola, and a new piste in the Cinque Torri zone.

See [cortina.dolomiti.org](http://cortina.dolomiti.org); Inghams ([www.ingham.co.uk](http://www.ingham.co.uk)) has packages Tetnuldi, Georgia Best for: adventurers Over the past couple of winters there has been a growing buzz about Georgia, with thrill-seeking ski mountaineers bringing back stories of pristine valleys and chest-deep powder. Now, more mainstream operators are getting in on the act.

Mountain Heaven, which runs chalet holidays in France and Switzerland, is launching a nine-day trip that visits three of the country's small resorts and uses lifts (rather than ski touring) throughout. Participants need only be of an intermediate standard to take part.

Highlights will include wine tastings and visits to ancient churches and to Mestia, a village in the Upper Svaneti region where the medieval tower houses are Unesco-listed. Just up the valley from there is Tetnuldi, a tiny ski area whose lifts opened in 2016.

The trip costs (EURO)2,100 and departs March 6; [www.mountainheaven.co.uk](http://www.mountainheaven.co.uk) Ski news continues on page 15 Kaprun, Austria Best for: guaranteed snow and pre-Christmas skiing If you can't wait to go skiing again, look no further than the village of Kaprun - up on the lofty glaciers of the Kitzsteinhorn, the pistes are due to open this weekend.

Professional ski racers and instructors-in-training have long flocked here for pre-season practice sessions on slopes that rise to 3,029m, but for recreational skiers there has always been a key drawback. The lifts up to the Kitzsteinhorn begin 7km outside Kaprun and, while there is a free shuttle, there can be queues and packed buses at peak times. There is a separate ski area just above the village, the Maiskogel, but it is relatively small and best suited to families and beginners.

In 2017 the Maiskogel and Kitzsteinhorn lift companies merged, and this winter sees the culmination of their masterplan - an (EURO)81m, two-stage lift system that joins the two ski areas and takes skiers from the centre of

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the village directly to the glacier ski area for the first time. The initial section transports skiers from the village up to the Maiskogel; the second, the "3K K-connection", travels more than 4km from there to Langweid, entry point to the Kitzsteinhorn area. The complete cable-car journey from village to peak covers 12km and rises 2,261m. At the summit station, visitors will find a 360m tunnel through the mountain leading to a viewing platform giving dramatic vistas of the Grossglockner, Austria's highest peak.

Kaprun itself is a lively village, attractive even in mid-January, when high-altitude, purposebuilt resorts can be bleak. As well as numerous traditional hotels, there is a vast public spa and wellness centre, the Tauern Spa, which is adding 52 bedrooms for this winter. Guests will have access to 11 indoor and outdoor pools and 10 sauna and steam rooms, perfect for restoring aching muscles after a day on the slopes.

The Alpen Express sleeper train runs direct from Amsterdam to numerous Austrian resorts, including Kaprun's neighbour Zell am See, as well as St Anton, Kitzbühel and Saalfelden.

See [kitzsteinhorn.at](http://kitzsteinhorn.at), [zellamsee-kaprun.at](http://zellamsee-kaprun.at) and [alpen.express](http://alpen.express). Crystal ([www.crystalski.co.uk](http://www.crystalski.co.uk)) has packages Val d'Isère, France Best for: classic descents and new hotels With a vast, varied and high-altitude ski area, Val d'Isère has a good claim to be the **world's** best resort. The only deficiency has been a scarcity of really special hotels - the focus has always been on its lavish chalets (try those run by Le Chardon and Consensio).

This winter, that changes with the arrival of two noteworthy, and very different, hotels. In the centre of the village, at the foot of the slopes, Le Mademoiselle is a luxurious new five-star, a sister property to the storied Les Airelles in Courchevel. When France introduced its "palace" designation - a tier above five-star - in 2011, Les Airelles was one of only eight establishments in the country to win it, and the hotel played a key role in turning Courchevel into the jet-set honeypot it has become. The new Val d'Isère property will have 41 art-and antique-stuffed rooms, suites and penthouses, as well as the village's largest spa.

Meanwhile, up on the mountain, the summit station of the resort's first cable car has been transformed into a high-altitude hotel, 2,551m above sea level. Le Refuge de Solaise (above) was due to open last winter but was delayed by heavy snow; it now offers 16 bedrooms, four apartments, a restaurant and a dormitory for 14. Fabulous views - and first tracks in the morning - come as standard.

Doubles at Le Mademoiselle from (EURO)850, half-board; [www.valdisere airelles.com](http://www.valdisere airelles.com). Doubles at Le Refuge de Solaise from (EURO)500; [www.lerefuge-valdisere.com](http://www.lerefuge-valdisere.com).

See [www.lechardonvaldisere.com](http://www.lechardonvaldisere.com) and [www.consensiochalets.co.uk](http://www.consensiochalets.co.uk) for chalets. Oxford Ski ([www.oxfordski.com](http://www.oxfordski.com)) has packages

'Alta has a reputation as the traditionalist's resort. So eyebrows were raised by the arrival this year of its first luxury hotel'

'Kicking Horse is doubling down on its image as a place of pilgrimage for the hardcore'

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