

COUNTRY LIFE

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EVERY WEEK



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The house that inspired Britten

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PLUS where to buy a ski chalet in 2013 and the best ever calf's liver recipe





The big five: Alpine ski resorts

Staking a pole in a *piste*-side property isn't for the faint-hearted. Arabella Youens examines the chalet market and finds some pocket-friendly alternatives



Verbier

Described as a 'Mecca' by the *cognoscenti*, the Swiss resort of Verbier in the Four Valleys ski area is dominating the scene as the 'it' resort in the Alps. The skiing is fantastic, particularly off-*piste*, the *après-ski* is glamorous (residents James Blunt and Lawrence Dallaglio co-own a restaurant, La Vache), there are lots of attractive, south-facing chalets and a trendy new W Verbier hotel is opening next month.

It tops the charts for the most popular resort for British chalet buyers. 'I'd say that 95% of our enquiries are for Verbier,' explains Jeremy Rollason of Savills Alpine Homes. 'Of course, they may be just window shopping, but it's by far and away the most desirable resort for our buyers.' But popularity comes at quite a price:

a four-bedroom ski-in/ski-out chalet costs about £10.5 million and, despite the quiet economic conditions in recent times, prices have risen more than 5% year on year, according to Alpine Homes.

As an alternative, think about **Haute-Nendaz** in the next valley: 'Nendaz is the thinking man's Verbier,' says Mr Rollason. 'Prices for top-end property are between a third and a half of equivalent apartments and chalets in Verbier. What was once a rather sleepy resort, clinging on to her neighbour's decidedly more glamorous coat-tails, Nendaz is becoming a destination in its own right, with a collection of good restaurants, bars and boutique shops.'

Savills are selling a two-bedroom, recently renovated chalet close to the centre of the village for CHF560,000 (£388,000) (020-7016 3740; www.savills.co.uk).

Verbier

CHF6.5 million (£4.448 million)

A seven-minute walk from this five-bedroom chalet will deliver you into the centre of Verbier. With wooden floors and beams, the living room has a wraparound terrace. There's also a self-contained apartment. Abercrombie & Kent International Estates (020-3667 7016; www.akinternational-estates.com)

Courchevel 1850

Although, in the 1980s and 1990s, Courchevel 1850 held a stake in the crown of most popular resort for its snow-sure season and access across Les Trois Vallées terrain—the world's largest ski

Firm favourites: resorts with price rises in 2013

Verbier
Zermatt
Grindelwald
Villars
Klosters
Wengen
Megève
Méribel
Chamonix
Flaine
La Plagne

Source: Savills Alpine Homes

**Courchevel 1850
€25 million**

Banish all pre-conceptions of yellowing, pine-clad walls and antler heads here—this modern, three-storey chalet in the Cospillot area of the resort is a sleek and stylish Alpine retreat. A swimming pool, complete with waterfalls and a swim jet, is located on the ground floor and the rest of the space is taken up by two large living rooms, 5–6 bedrooms and a library—all of which are served by a lift. Knight Frank (www.knightfrank.co.uk; 020-7629 8171)



area—it wasn't until the dawn of the new millennium that the resort caught the eyes of new wealth coming out of Russia.

It's not chocolate-box beautiful (it was France's first purpose-built ski resort), but it now glistens and flashes with gold and designer labels—it's Saint-Tropez on snow,' believes Nigel

Hindle of French buying agents Hindle & Baldock. The shopping rivals Bond Street and seven restaurants boast 11 Michelin stars between them. 'The Russians know of no other resort in the Alps,' affirms Roddy Aris of Winkworth International. 'There's no limit to the cost of a ski-in/ski-out chalet. It's just

like the Caps in the South of France; the best chalets will cost many millions.'

Alternatively, think about the lower villages. Savills has a three-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment, which comes with a garage and cellar in **Courchevel 1550** for €800,000 (020-7016 3740; www.savills.co.uk).



**Val d'Isère
€6 million**

This brand-new, spacious chalet comes with its own swimming pool and Turkish bath and has five en-suite bedrooms. With 2,900sq ft of living space, plus extra room for ski lockers and utility rooms, it's generously laid out and sits just minutes from the heart of the town. Home Hunts (00 33 970 44 66 43; www.home-hunts.com)



Val d'Isère

Its high-altitude position close to the Italian border means that Val d'Isère reportedly has the best snow in the Alps and it's been a long-term favourite of British skiers over the decades. There are excellent *piste*-side restaurants and fantastic skiing in the well-linked Espace Killy. It also boasts what is arguably the best *après-ski* bar in the Alps: La Folie Douce, in which some

2,000 people gather on their way back to the resort to dance while still in their ski boots.

'The downside is that you're at such a high altitude that there's no tree cover, so it can be very grisly when the weather turns,' explains Mr Aris. It's also a bit of a trek to get to from the airport: Geneva is at least a 2½-hour drive away. But that doesn't put people off and the property market is a tight niche, as only five new-build chalets are created each year. 'You don't get cheaply built chalets and apartment buildings in Val,' says Chris Leder of Home Hunts, who's been living in the Tarentaise Valley for 12 years. 'It means prices are high, but the market is stable as there's always good demand.'

Erna Low is marketing the two remaining chalets of a very rare new-build development in the resort—Chalets Alaska—from €2.5 million for four bedrooms up to €12 million for a spacious seven-bedroom chalet (020-7590 1624; www.ernalowproperty.co.uk).

The alternative is Val's 'ugly sister' **Tignes** or, for even better value, **Tignes les Brévières**, which is the renovated old village at the lowest point of the slopes. Alpine Property Investments is marketing a five-bedroom chalet just 165 yards from the *piste* for

€1.075 million (01722 743662; www.alpinepropertyinvestments.co.uk).

Chamonix

Its dramatic setting, history, heritage, proximity to Geneva and 'arguably some of the best skiing in the world', according to Roddy Aris, has crowned Chamonix the unofficial capital of the Alps. 'La Vallée Blanche—a 14-mile off-*piste* run—is extraordinary. I don't know of any other run that comes close,' he adds.

Another major attraction is that it's a genuine year-round resort, a key climbing centre in the summer and has no whiff of ghost town. However, it's much more disjointed than the Trois Vallées and the Espace Killy, doesn't cater as well for families and doesn't quite have the cachet of the above-mentioned resorts, so property prices are correspondingly lower. 'Whereas you might be paying €18,000psm to €20,000psm in Val d'Isère, it drops to €10,000psm to €12,000psm here,' explains Mr Leder.

Alternatively, think about **Les Houches**, which enjoys long descents through tree-lined slopes. Leggett has a ski-in/ski-out six-bedroom chalet on the edge of the Aillouds blue *piste*—a rarity for the Chamonix valley—which it's marketing for €1.595 million (00 33 533 56 62 54; www.leggettski.com). >

Chamonix €3.69 million

With excellent views of the Mont Blanc massif, this four-bedroom chalet situated in Les Nants retains the charm of a traditional Alpine home, while boasting all the trimmings a modern family might require. A large terrace area surrounds a heated swimming pool and there's a spacious garden for the summer months. Leggett (00 33 533 56 62 54; www.leggettski.com)

Off the beaten piste

Tremblant, Canada

Why? It's one of the closest transatlantic resorts—and one of the most affordable

Samoëns, France

Why? An authentic Alpine village without an image: 1970s pink *salopettes* are still fine

La Thuile, Italy

Why? You can heliski legally in Italy, and doesn't pasta make a nice change at lunchtime?

Engelberg, Switzerland

Why? For weekenders, the resort puts on an 11pm shuttle from Zurich airport every Thursday and Friday, so you can work until 6pm and be at the resort by 12.30am



Méribel

The marginally less ritzy sister resort to Courchevel, Méribel is, nevertheless, a big draw for British buyers. It was first developed by a Scotsman in the 1930s and, today, it's known for its lively *après-ski*. Last year, La Folie Douce opened a new club in the town and this season, there will be a series of Ibiza Rocks weeks with DJs flown in from the island.

'The advantage is that you're in the middle of the Three Valleys, so in the best starting point to explore the excellent skiing,' advises Matthew Hodder-Williams of Knight Frank. 'There's also plenty of stock to suit the buyers: Méribel Mottaret is largely apartment-based, but Méribel and Les Allues have more chalets.' Some agents suggest that buying in Méribel might be a more secure bet, property-wise, as the top-end market isn't dominated by one nationality.

As with Courchevel, the lower down the mountain you go, the cheaper the prices, although nothing comes cheap in this town. Leggett has a one-bedroom apartment in **Méribel Les Allues** for €495,000 (00 33 533 56 62 54; www.leggettski.com).

Morzine

Even just five years ago, this resort in the Portes du Soleil *domaine* perhaps wouldn't have appeared on a list

of top five resorts for British buyers, but this has now changed. The word on the slopes this season is that Morzine is fast becoming a new Alpine hotspot.

As its name suggests, the Portes du Soleil ski domain enjoys great sunshine and good snow once you're high enough and, of all the resorts, 'Morzine is the nicest,' believes Mr Aris. It also benefits from easy access, as it's just one hour's drive from Geneva. 'Plus, the resort is catering towards the family market rather than top end, so there are wallet-friendly shops and restaurants. It's also nice in the summer.'

Chalets and apartments are considerably cheaper than in the other top-five resorts. 'If you've got €2 million to spend, I'd definitely recommend looking at Morzine right now,' says Mr Leder. 'There are some really nice new-build chalets and prices are much more reasonable.'

Alternatives to Morzine include one of the villages down the valley, such as **St Jean d'Aulps** and **Abondance**, which is a charming village with its own ski slopes that are perfect for beginners and it's a five-minute (free) bus ride to the lifts going up to the Portes du Soleil *domaine*.

Home Hunts has a five-bedroom chalet in Abondance, which has beautiful south-facing views, for €1.05 million (00 33 625 74 28 54; www.home-hunts.com).

Morzine €1.59 million

This six-bedroom, traditional-style chalet comes with underfloor heating and a wood-burning stove—perfect conditions to warm up in after a busy day on the slopes. Although it's not ski-in/ski-out, access to the vast array of slopes in the Portes du Soleil *domaine* is easy via an efficient ski bus. Winkworth (020-7870 7181; www.winkworth-international.com)

Affordable alternatives



Courchevel 1550, €800,000

This three-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment is one of three in this attractive chalet, which lies just two minutes from the ski slopes. The living room has a lovely south-facing terrace and there is room to create a fourth bedroom if desired. Downstairs is a double garage, cellar and ski locker. Savills (020-7016 3740)



Tignes Les Brévières, €199,000

Santa Terra is new four-star development of 32 apartments available on a leaseback scheme, ranging from €199,000 for a one-bedroom apartment and rising to €678,900 for a four-bedroom duplex. Most have balcony views of both the high Alps and Les Brévières lake and come fully equipped. Erna Low Property (020-7590 1624)



Haute Nendaz, CHF825,000

La Forêt is the final phase of the Mer de Glace development, located in the centre of Haute Nendaz. These last remaining 11 apartments, with prices starting at CHF825,000 (£572,000) for two bedrooms, will be serviced by a new four-star hotel. Savills (020-7016 3740)