

GAY SKIING 2005

CHRIS GEARY takes the piste



TO most people the idea of a holiday is relaxing on the beach. To others it means a time for action and excitement. Skiing is obviously the latter, but you shouldn't knock it before you've tried it. The love of a skiing holiday isn't just about the skiing, it's about the whole thing - the amazing scenery, the country and the people you meet. It's for all age groups from 4 to 94 - taking it as steady or as fast as you like. The thrill and pumped adrenaline the slopes bring you is totally unique. It's just like flying. You're up there on top of the world, gliding through glistening white powder beneath an ink-blue sky. It makes you feel like a bird.

With 130 tour operators offering 320 resorts in some 16 countries it's not easy to decide where to go and how to get there. If you want to be sure of adequate snow cover, when choosing your resort avoid any European resorts with a top lift station less than 2,800m. Choosing the right accommodation is important too. Try and get door-to-door skiing - there's nothing worse than lugging a pair of skis while walking in ski boots!

The most popular destination for British skiers is France, attracting over 30% of the market. Austria is second favourite, then Italy. Next with about 13%, comes little Andorra which has recently spent £31 million upgrading its principle resorts. Canada and the United States only manage to take fifth place together, despite the marketing hype. Switzerland lies lower in the league, but with its favourable exchange rate, as with America at the moment, it's good value for money. How much it's going to cost depends entirely on how

much you want to spend. An average "spend" from a typical British skier or snowboarder is around £590 per person. However, the hidden costs of clothing, lift pass, equipment, lessons, in-resort meals and entertainment can easily double this figure. A rash of new websites offering direct bookings and some great last-minute bargains are worth checking out www.lglu.com and www.Skibeds.com.

Après-ski is very important, there is nothing worse than being bored in the evenings. If you thought you might find a thriving gay nightclub or bar in a ski resort you can think again! That's why it's a good idea to go! On one of the many gay ski weeks or weekends on offer. There are three types to think about.

All Inclusive Package holiday: The whole hotel is booked out and made

exclusively gay for a week. You have to pay the money up front, and it seems expensive, but if you factor in that all meals, accommodation and evening entertainment are included in the package price, it works out a good deal. Perfect if you like to be looked after and everything organised for you. However, the downside is that you don't feel venturing outside the hotel much to explore the ski resorts restaurants and bars as you've already paid for your meals in your hotel.

Pay for the entertainment: Some of the major ski resorts organise gay ski weeks. Entertainment such as parties, dinners and pub-crawls are organised around the whole resort. The accommodation, travel and amount of participation in the events are much more flexible. A host hotel is nominated but not exclusively gay.

THE COCKPIT CLUB: GAY SKI WEEKS

2005 Date	Country	Resort	Name of event
5 - 9 Jan	USA	Park City	Utah Ski Week
15 - 22 Jan	France	La Plagne	Euro Gay Ski Week
18 - 23 Jan	USA	Aspen	Aspen Gay Ski Week
21 - 23 Jan	Canada	Lake Louise	Powder and Pride
23 - 30 Jan	Austria	St Anton	Dream Waves Holidays
23 - 30 Jan	Austria	Gasteiner	Gay ski week Gasteiner Valley
29 Jan - 7 Feb	Canada	Whistler	Altitude
18 - 21 Feb	USA	Hudson Valley	Winter Explosion
22 - 27 Feb	USA	Breckenridge	Summit Gay Ski Week
26 Feb - 3 Mar	USA	Telluride	Telluride Gay Ski Week
26 Feb - 5 Mar	Switzerland	Sölden	Swing
6 - 13 Mar	USA	Lake Tahoe	Lake Tahoe WinterFest
28 Mar - 3 Apr	Italy	Pila	European Gay Ski Week
30 Mar - 3 Apr	USA	Keystone	OutBoard
2 - 9 Apr	Austria	Sölden	Gay Snowhappening
3 - 10 Sep	New Zealand	Queenstown	Gay Ski Week New Zealand

Website
www.gayskiing.org
www.eurogayskiweek.com
www.gayskiweek.com
www.ubproductions.com
www.gayholidaysdirect.com
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Gay run chalet or get your own gay group together: OK, the parties aren't so big and there's less shagging around (unless you have that kind of group of mates) but it is a nice, friendly atmosphere with quiet nights in.

The biggest gay ski week takes place in **Aspen** in the US. This Colorado resort was, quite rightly, recommended as one of the best in the world and is for skiers and shoppers of all standards. It's got a reputation as being the 'winter playground for the rich and famous'. The skiing and snowboarding is nothing short of excellent. It's one of the longest running ski events, attracts around 5,000 people each year and goes by the slogan, "The largest gay winter event in the world". Parties and events are laid on throughout the week like the Snowball Pool Party and infamous downhill costume competition.

Another top favourite takes place in **Canada** at the beginning of February. It's called **Altitude** and attracts around 2,500 people. Like Aspen, there are many events and après-ski entertainment on offer. This one is my favourite as the skiing is fantastic and the circuit parties are wild.

The **European Gay Ski Week** takes place towards the end of the season, the next one being in April 2005. It's Europe's biggest gay ski event and this year moves to Pila in Italy. It's run as an all inclusive package holiday from the London based ManAround gay holiday company. The up front price includes: full board accommodation, wine with your meals, lift pass, ski tuition and seven nights of special cabaret entertainment, top DJs and parties. Unfortunately, the number of people that can attend is restricted to the hotel's capacity (usually around 500) so you'll need to book early as it sells out quick. Tel. 020 8795 6569 and quote 'GX' for latest deals.

There are many other gay ski weekends and clubs to investigate across the world. Whether you choose to ski or snowboard it's an experience you won't forget. If you have never skied before then I'd strongly recommend it. A good tip is to get yourself to a gym and get those leg muscles into shape before you travel... unless you want to ache for the entire week. Remember, you're never too old to start, never too young to try and you've always got one of the many dry slopes to practice on before you travel.

> **Pics by Chris Geary at Alternative Holiday's European Gay Ski Week.**

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