



Time to Wish for Snow and Ice – Overseas!

The winter ski brochures have yet to reach some retail agents but they are online, with Austria and France still the 'big draws' – and don't forget to sell winter sports insurance!

With Inghams having decided to withdraw from the Republic of Ireland ski market (although still operating ex-Belfast), that now leaves Crystal Ski and Topflight as the main ski tour operators, with online and specialist operators and self-booked itineraries making up the remainder.

For the winter 2011/2012 season Crystal Ski is offering a wide variety of destinations in seven European countries (Andorra, Austria, Bulgaria, France, Italy, Slovenia and Switzerland) as well as in Canada and the USA. Until the end of August there is an early booking discount of €30 per adult – and there are also some great-value Ski Plus deals on offer.

Topflight is offering Andorra, Austria, Bulgaria, France and Italy. If your client wants their ski holiday to be, well, a bit different, Topflight also has the third annual ITRA tag rugby ski trip to Westendorf on 4th – 11th February 2012.

Sunway dropped out of the main ski market a few years ago but continues to sell Club Med ski. Tanya Airey of Sunway Travel Group said: "Club Med ski is an upmarket, mainly family product and our sales have obviously been hit by our current economic climate. In terms of numbers it is very small, as it is an expensive quality product. Sales are still strong but are down from the highs of 2006 to 2008."

Ray Scully of Crystal Ski said: "The 2009/2010 season was difficult but 2010/2011 was very good for the tour operators because we had adjusted seat numbers correctly. About 32,000 travelled on the charters, giving a 95% load factor, and the overall

market was around 45,000.

"For the coming season I would estimate a small overall drop to 42,000, but an increase in charter

bookings to 35,000, as more people take one one week ski holiday rather than two 3-to-5-night trip: and 'turn back' to tour operators. Prices will be generally the same, although one or two specific hotel: might be more expensive."

Ciaran Mulligan, Joint Managing Director of **Blue Insurances**, estimates that up to 20% of Irish skiers go skiing without proper winter sports insurance. Given the potentially high cost of incidents (see panel) this is a disturbing figure and would suggest ignorance or complacency (some might add stupidity) on the part of skiers and missed sales opportunities on the part of those selling ski holidays.

Given that the ski tour operators either sell insurance cover as part of a package or require sight of the client's alternative insurance policy, combined with their estimate of how many skiers will purchase a package holiday, that 20% estimate may seem high, but Ciaran added: "I think more and more people will continue to dynamic package their ski holiday in 2011/12. I know a lot of people are looking at four- or five-night ski trips rather than the full week, or they will do two long weekends instead of one week.

"I think my 20% is right regarding persons not travelling with insurance as some people have EHIC cards and so don't take insurance (even though the EHIC card doesn't cover all treatment and excludes private clinics). Or they have private health insurance, which only covers between €50,000 – €100,000, even though these limits are not adequate enough for a very serious medical claim.

Example Costs of Ski Claims Incurred

(Depends if transport home is required. Source **Blue Insurances**)

Andorra

Fractured hip from ski lift accident: €12,000

Austria

Shoulder injury and cruciate ligament damage: €11,000

France

Slid on ice and hit a tree, fracturing left arm and femur: €4,000
Broken leg (off-piste skiing with a guide): €11,500

Italy

Serious traumatic head injury from skiing into a crash barrier (AA required): €21,000

Switzerland

Broken leg: €8,000

Canada

Wrist injuries while snowboarding (no third party involved): €11,000
Fractured leg while skiing: €17,000
Severe facial injuries from third-party collision: €34,000
Fractured pelvis from falling on piste: €48,000

USA

Fractured tibia: €13,000
Broken tibia: €21,000
Head injuries and fractured ribs from skiing into a tree: €14,000
Spine and wrist injuries while snowboarding: €18,000
Fractured tibula and fibula while snowboarding: €39,000

Countries and Resorts

Andorra

Approximately 4,500 Irish skiers went to Andorra last season with tour operators, many attracted by the value for money, good choices for families and first-time skiers, sunny days and good quality of snow.

The tourist board expects in-country prices to increase by 0%-2.5% for the coming season. No major developments are planned, except for the final works in preparation for the first World Cup Women's Alpine Ski in Soldeu on 11th-12th

February 2012.

Both Crystal and Topflight offer Arinsal in the Vallnord ski area and Soldeu/El Tartar in Grandvalira – where the Crystal programme also includes Pas de la Casa, the highest resort in Andorra.

Austria

Austria is by far the most popular destination for Irish skiers – 34,200 last season staying an average of 5.23 nights. This was a 13.4% decline on the previous year but for the coming season the Austrian National Tourist Office is hoping for “a positive development, helped by the more favourable calendar (Easter is two weeks earlier) and the more stable economic environment. Austria offers great value for money – and we believe prices will stay more or less the same – as well as natural grown ski resorts, family run hotels, perfect slopes mixed together with ‘gemutlichkeit’ and an après ski scene that consistently ranks as one of Europe’s best.”

Last winter the Austrian resorts invested €562 million in the improvement of cable cars / ski resorts, including €287m on security and modernisation, and €153m on snow making facilities.

Crystal Ski’s ex-Ireland programme lists no less than 38 Austrian resorts, while Topflight offers 11. The only resort ‘unique’ to Topflight is Kirchberg, 6km from Kitzbuhel.

Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, Borovets and Pamporovo feature in the Crystal and Topflight brochures and are both ideal for first-time skiers. Borovets has lively après ski, while Pamporovo is renowned for its sunshine.

France

In France Topflight offers nine resorts, seven of which are in the Three Valleys area and two – Les Arcs and La Plagne – in Paradise Ski. All of these, plus another 24 resorts, are also included in the Crystal Ski programme.

An ideal family choice is Chamrousse, which has a free lift pass for all Crystal guests, a short transfer, an excellent ski school, and wide pistes that are relatively uncrowded and ideal for beginners and improvers.

Germany

About 5,400 Irish skiers chose Germany last season (6% of Irish visitors as a whole). Many went to Bercht-

esgaden, a popular ski resort in Bavaria where Europe’s first ski touring park was opened at the end of 2009.

A ski pass for all five skiing regions in Berchtesgaden (valid for six days) costs €142 in the winter season 2011/12 – the same price as last year. There is also free use of public transport buses with a visitor pass (valid for all overnight guests) in the region.

Italy

In Italy, while Topflight concentrates on the duty-free resort of Livigno in the Alps close to the Swiss border, Crystal offers 11 resorts: Bardonecchia, on the border with France; Cervinia, dominated by the Matterhorn; the unspoilt village of Champoluc; Claviere, also on the border with France; Courmayeur, at the foot of Mont Blanc; Gressoney, to the west of the Monte Rosa, Europe’s second highest mountain; La Thuile, Pila, Sansicario, Sauze d’Oulx, and the international resort of Sestriere.

Slovenia

In Slovenia, Crystal offers two resorts: the lakeside Bled with plenty non-skiing activities, and the village of Kranjska Gora in the foothills of the Julian Alps.

Switzerland

Crystal’s Switzerland programme comprises 12 resorts: the mountain village of Adelboden,

Grindelwald in the Jungfrau mountain range, Lauterbrunnen, Les Diablerets, Leukerbad (with 22 thermal baths), Nendaz, Saas Fee, the large chalet-style resort of Verbier, Veysonnaz – ideal for couples and families, Villars, the virtually traffic-free Wengen, and Zermatt, spectacularly situated beneath the majestic Matterhorn.

Canada and the USA

Crystal Ski has North America ‘to itself’, offering nine Canadian resorts and 12 in the USA.

The Canadian resorts comprise Banff in the heart of the Canadian Rockies; Fernie, renowned for its record snow levels and ‘steep and deep’ terrain; the frontier town of Jasper; the small village of Lake

Louise; Panorama; Tremblant, voted by Ski Magazine as the best ski resort in Eastern North America for 12 years in a row; and Whistler, consistently ranked number one ski resort in North America.

In the USA, the Crystal programme includes Aspen and Snowmass, Beaver Creek – just 10 miles past Vail, Breckenridge – the number one USA resort for Irish skiers, Copper Mountain – voted the number one resort by Crystal guests, Jackson Hole, Killington – the largest ski area on the East Coast, Lake Tahoe, New Hampshire – an ideal ski destination for beginner and intermediate skiers, Steamboat, Stowe, Vail – one of the world's top ski resorts, and Winter Park – the closest major resort to Denver.



"Ski tour operators and travel agents should be highlighting the medical costs involved with a skiing accident."

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