



Best for Alpine charm CHAMONIX

Admittedly, France doesn't really 'do' chocolate-box Alpine charm so there's not a great deal of competition in this respect. But the old mountaineering centre of Chamonix (*below*), still a proper working town, ranks among the most characterful resorts in world skiing. Located at the foot of Mont Blanc, it also has some of the most demanding ski terrain in

the Alps – not to mention jaw-dropping scenery. It really does have everything – from cobbled streets to glorious *fin de siècle* architecture and a great Alpine museum. And as a reminder of the huge glaciers draped around the mountains above it, a river runs through the bustling centre, fed by the biggest glacier of all – the awe-inspiring Vallée Blanche.



Best for value LA MONGIE

You get more for your money in the French Pyrenees than in the French Alps, but don't assume for a moment that they're the poor relation. At 5,900ft, La Mongie is a modern and sophisticated ski station at the foot of the Pic du Midi, part of the route of

The Pyrenees are no poor relation to the Alps – the thermal baths work wonders on aching muscles

the Tour de France. A big part of the resort's appeal is that it is linked to the charming old Napoleonic spa town of Barèges, France's second-oldest ski resort, on the edge of the Parc National des Pyrénées; the bonus is that the thermal baths work wonders on aching muscles and joints. And if you need a more spiritual cure, visit the pilgrimage town of Lourdes, just a 40-minute drive down La Vallée de Luz. ◆

For further information on skiing holidays in France, visit saga.co.uk/ski

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The hills are alive

Glastonbury should look to its laurels – music festivals are taking off in the Alps

AUSTRIA Mayrhofen: Altitude Festival March 26-31 Snowbombing April 9-14

This popular Tyrolean ski resort holds consecutive annual festivals devoted to comedy and music. Jimmy Carr, Al Murray, Ed Byrne and Frankie Boyle are among the A-list stand-ups who'll be demonstrating plenty of attitude at Altitude at the end of March, while Fatboy Slim and Groove Armada are among the headliners at the Snowbombing music festival in April. Leiderhosen and dirndls are unlikely to be much in evidence at either. Visit altitudefestival.com; snowbombing.com/en

SWITZERLAND Zermatt Unplugged April 17-21

Now in its fifth year, this festival started as a one-off concert in the basement of a

boutique hotel in Zermatt, the über-fashionable ski destination at the foot of the Matterhorn. Since then, the headliners have included Lionel Richie, Alanis Morissette, Billy Idol, Gabrielle, Seal and David Gray. It now has eight stages and looks set to become the Glastonbury of the Alps, but with better toilets and scenery – and infinitely better food. Could the 2012 line-up include one of the festival patrons – local resident Frida from Abba?

Zermatt's reputation for having the best mountain restaurants in the world is such that it has a unique gourmet ski-guiding service. As well as taking you to the best restaurants, your guide will book the best table, advise you what to eat and drink, book concert tickets and even ensure you get to the gig on time. And you don't even have to be a skier. Visit zermatt-unplugged.ch; mountainexposure.com ◆