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Feature  
**Tour Operator News 19-20**

BY PATRICK THORNE 14th October 2019



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BY MEGAN HUGHES

It's that time of year again when travel companies, airlines and everybody else hoping to grab your business during those four months of the main ski season from mid-December to mid-April announce their new ski destinations, new chalet and hotel choices, new flight routes, and anything else they can think of to get you to book.

The list of new options is always too long to squeeze into one feature, which is one of the reasons why we publish hundreds of news stories in print and online through the autumn. Here are some key points to be aware of this winter.

**Less Austerity, More Flexibility**

More than a decade after the age of austerity ushered in a boom in all-inclusive fixed-price ski holidays, we're seeing far fewer tour operators talking about that this season. Instead, the onus is more on affordable luxury and flexible travel options and trip durations. That matches with what various industry reports have been telling us has been the trend for the past few years.

One example is the new Premium range from Ski Collection, which features 11 properties in top resorts in the French Alps.

"All have an undoubtedly luxurious feel with exquisite interiors and quality facilities," a company spokesperson enthused.

**Fewer Chalets (From Some Companies)**

"This season, as a result of Brexit, some chalet companies have reduced their offering, resulting in fewer chalet holidays being available overall for 2019-20," said Craig Burton, CEO Active Travel Group. "It's therefore vital that families and groups keen to book the traditional week-long chalet break get booking soon."

However, one leading operator at least doesn't seem to have got that memo. Neilson, one of the UK's biggest ski companies, has announced it will be significantly expanding its Mountain Collection portfolio for winter 2019/20. It is adding a new flagship hotel, two chalet hotels and 12 chalets in Val d'Isère. This brings the overall number of exclusive Neilson-run properties offering the free "Mountain Experts" professional ski guiding and coaching service across France, Andorra, Austria and Italy to 44.

VIP SKI, which already has 11 chalets and one CLUB Chalet in Val d'Isère, are also unveiling their own new flagship property in the resort this winter after, they say, five years of planning and two decades after their first Aspen house. They have unveiled the all-new Aspen Lodge, which features their trademark smart contemporary mountain design, snugly wrapped in local timber and generously filled with impeccable interior design delivered with aplomb.

**The Brexit Eternity**

Of course, the Brexit process continues (or at least it was doing when we wrote this), and there's concern that a hard Brexit will cause issues for British workers hoping to be in the Alps, Dolomites, Pyrenees and elsewhere at the start of the season, although many people now seem beyond caring.

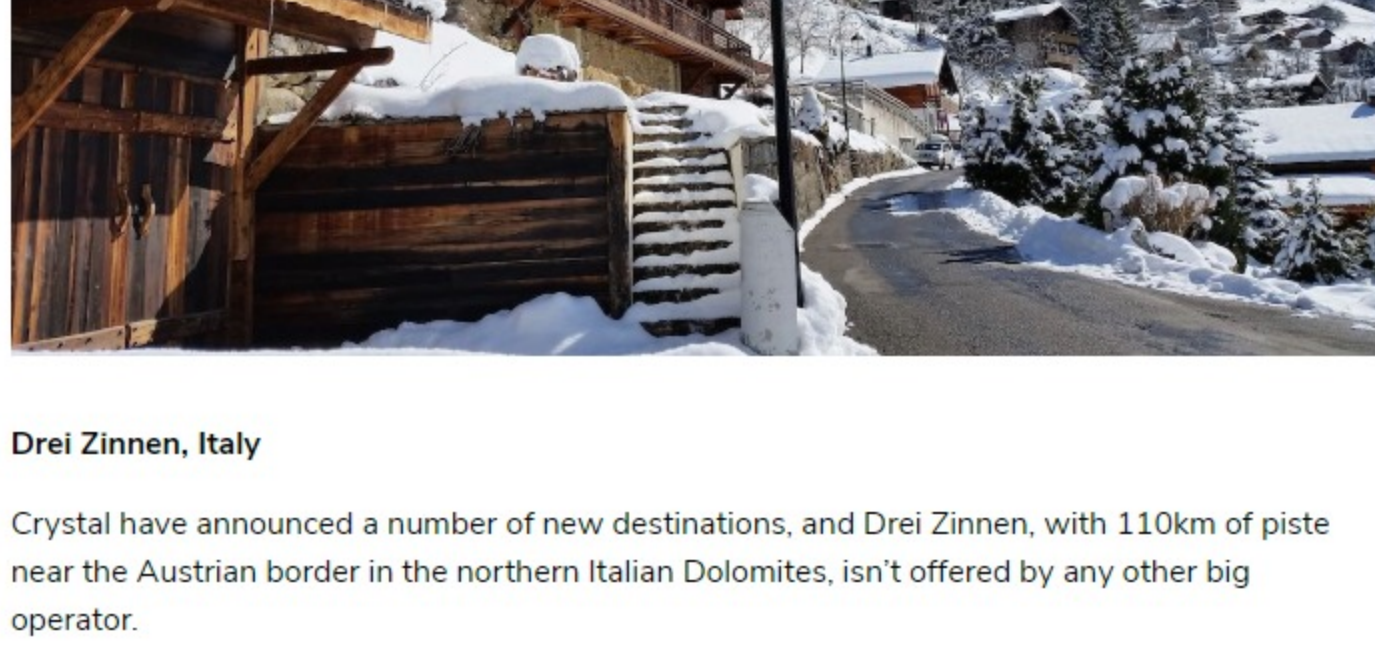
"Interest in ski holiday booking is still very high, and it would seem that 31 October is having less of an effect than the previous March deadline. I think most people got used to the idea one way or another and just want to get on with it in a kind of 'whatever happens, happens' way," said Xavier Schoulier of Peak Retreats in early September.

**New Destinations**

**Vars, France**

Erna Low have resumed offering ski holidays to the underrated "White Forest" ski region in the southern Alps, which Vars shares with Risoul on a well-priced lift ticket.

The specialists in smaller French ski resorts linked in to big ski areas also have new choices. Villard de Lans is a lively village with a large market centre and a dairy cooperative that has been producing blue cheese for over 600 years, while Les Sept Laux, another typically French resort in the Belledonne mountains, is made up of three lift-linked villages that have access to 120km of piste, as well as being home to one of the best-rated snow parks in France.



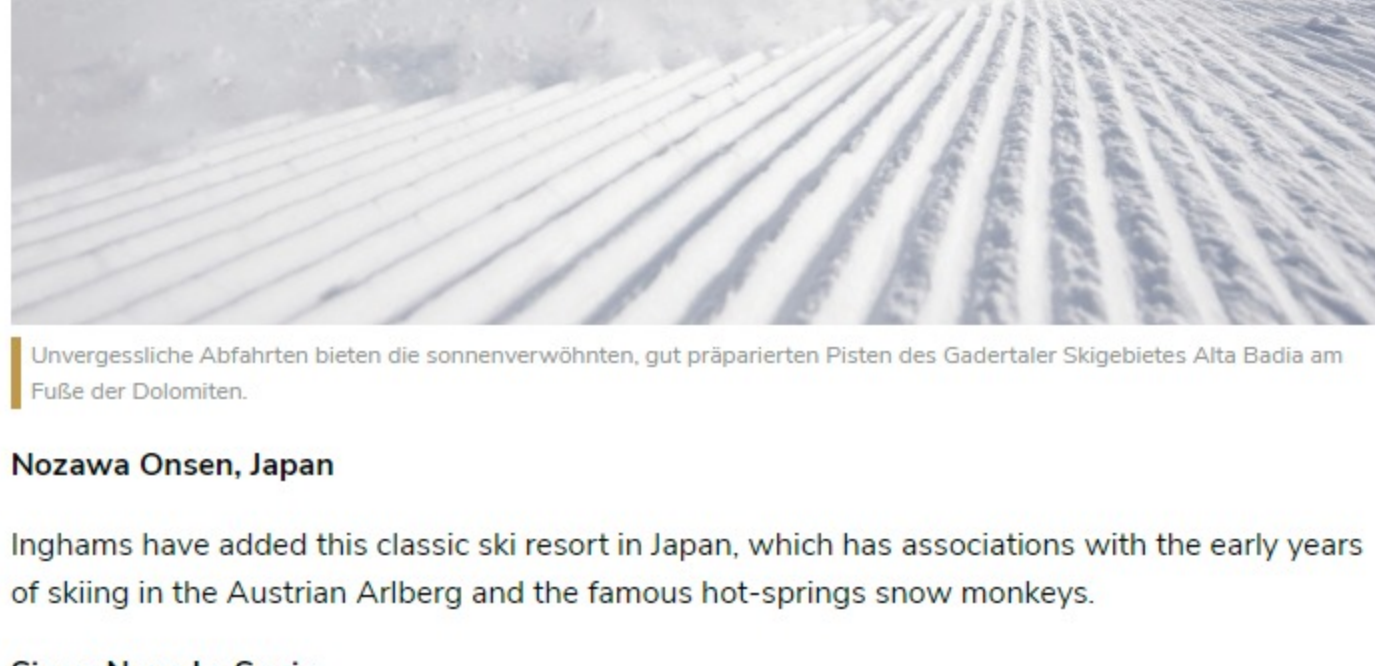
**Drei Zinnen, Italy**

Crystal have announced a number of new destinations, and Drei Zinnen, with 110km of piste near the Austrian border in the northern Italian Dolomites, isn't offered by any other big operator.

Rather further afield, Mountain Heaven, who have previously broken away from their norm of apartments and chalets in the Alps to offer ski trips to Iran, are to organise a trip to Georgia in 2020 – see our separate Georgia feature.

Italian ski holidays have been added to Skiworld's portfolio for the 2019/20 season, with self-catered apartments and hotels in Arabba, Corvara and Colfosco; Madonna di Campiglio; and Selva Val Gardena.

Ski Safari have their usual long list of enticing ski trips around the world, including Canada and Japan, but seem to have an ever-growing Scandinavian focus. This season, they've got a trip to Narvik on the northern Norwegian coast, which sits 140 miles within the Arctic Circle and is one of the most northerly towns in the world. A new Porsche-designed gondola was unveiled there earlier this year.



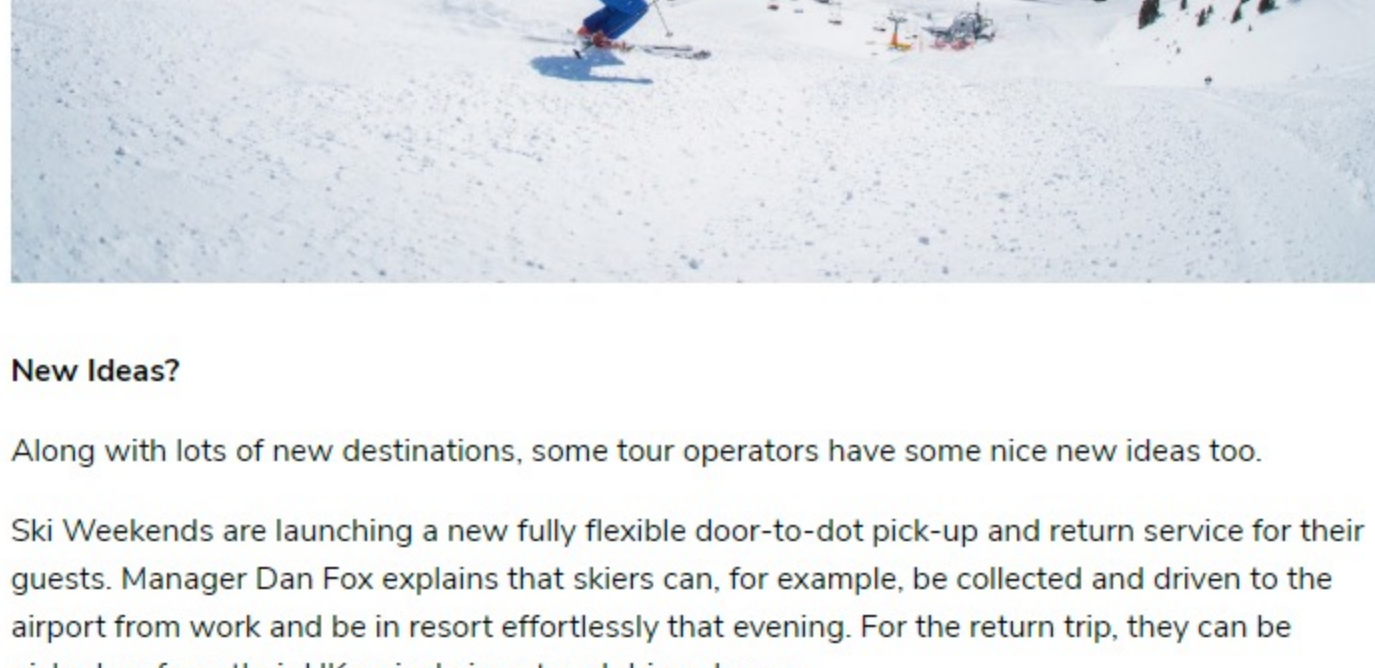
Unvergessliche Abfahrten bieten die sommerverwöhnten, gut präparierten Pisten des Gaderertaler Skigebietes Alta Badia am Fuße der Dolomiten.

**Nozawa Onsen, Japan**

Inghams have added this classic ski resort in Japan, which has associations with the early years of skiing in the Austrian Arlberg and the famous hot-springs snow monkeys.

**Sierra Nevada, Spain**

Sierra Nevada is already offered by a number of tour operators, who are joined this season by Ski Solutions. "It's a resort that is well known for its great snow record and sunny climate, and it is also really close to Granada, making it the perfect city and ski combination break," said Craig Burton, CEO Active Travel Group.



**New Ideas?**

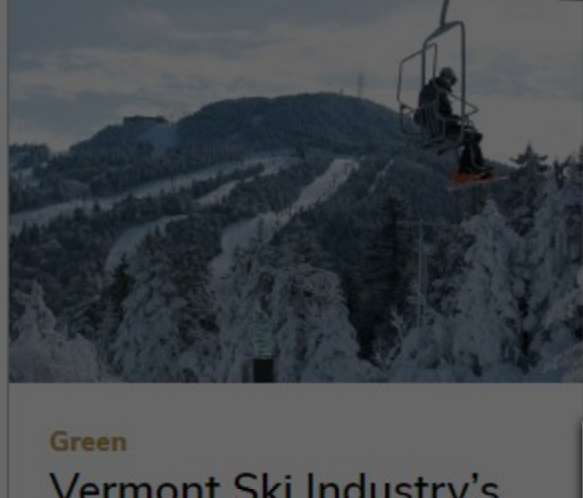
Along with lots of new destinations, some tour operators have some nice new ideas too. Ski's Weekends are launching a new fully flexible, door-to-dot pick-up and return service for their guests. Manager Dan Fox explains that skiers can, for example, be collected and driven to the airport from work and be in resort effortlessly that evening. For the return trip, they can be picked up from their UK arrival airport and driven home.

So-called singles specialist Friendship Travel has introduced Chalet Pregel in Alpe d'Huez to its line-up of ski holidays for the coming season. The seven-bedroom traditional chalet will operate as a house party exclusively for single travellers on six departure dates, including Christmas.

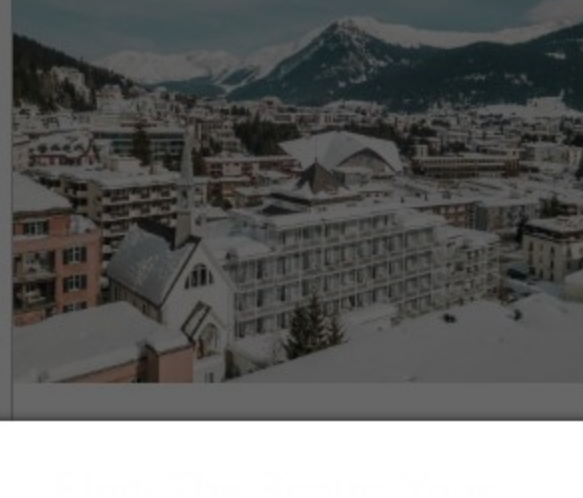
Finally, Clarian Chalets are planning a Ladies Ski Week staying in their La Grange au Merle chalet in the French resort of Châtel in March. The special week will include women-only instruction and plenty of pampering, with an all-day resort driver, a concierge service, a professional chef, gourmet food with wine during the evenings, and aperitifs with Crémant (French sparkling wine) on demand. Nice.

- Clarian Chalets: [clarianchalets.com](http://clarianchalets.com)
- Crystal: [crystalski.co.uk](http://crystalski.co.uk)
- Erna Low: [ErnaLow.co.uk](http://ErnaLow.co.uk)
- Friendship Travel: [friendshiptravel.com](http://friendshiptravel.com)
- Inghams: [ingham.co.uk](http://ingham.co.uk)
- Jet2: [jet2.com/en/ski](http://jet2.com/en/ski)
- Mountain Heaven: [mountainheaven.co.uk](http://mountainheaven.co.uk)
- Neilson: [neilson.co.uk](http://neilson.co.uk)
- Peak Retreats: [peakretreats.co.uk](http://peakretreats.co.uk)
- Ryanair: [Ryanair.com](http://Ryanair.com)
- SAS: [flysas.com](http://flysas.com)
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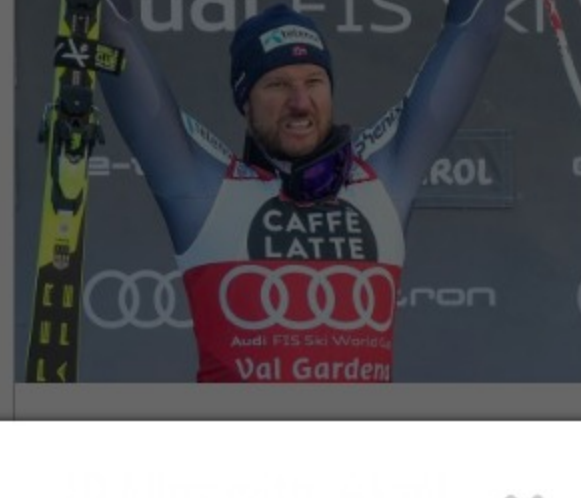
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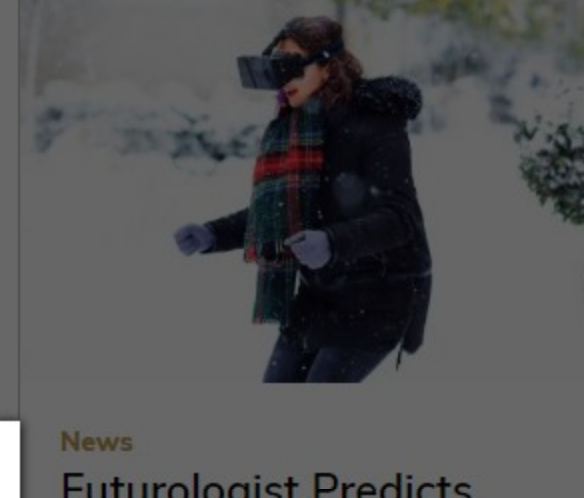
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