

Escape: Special report

by **ANDREW
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THERE are three things that put people off ski holidays: fear of physical pain, fear of not being very good... and fear of seeing their bank balance melt like snow in the Sahara.

The first two apply to those who have never tried skiing, but the third is universal and of irrational. It all adds up: travel, accommodation, lift pass, clothing and, because skiing without skis is tricky, equipment. However, there are ways to do it on the cheap. Look hard and you can get all the gloop for under £500.

But can a budget ski trip *really* be any good? The proof of the fondue is in the tasting...

KITTING OUT

AFTER some online searching, I come across a week in the French Alpine resort of Val Thorens for £400 per person through a company called WeSki.co.uk.

The trip includes return flights to Geneva, car hire, accommodation, equipment hire and lift pass. The flights are easyJet, with hand-carry gear only, but this is doable, especially if you wear bulkier items to travel.

After signing on the dotted line, the matter of what to wear is easily dealt with: I manage to buy all the essential ski clothes from Decathlon and Aldi for a bargain £82.93.

On arrival in Geneva, I head straight to the Avis desk and receive the keys to an Opel Crosslander, complete with winter tyres, which carries me on a scenic, three-hour drive to Val Thorens.

SETTLING IN

ARRIVING in darkness, I check in to my accommodation: a complex of basic, self-catered apartments called Le Cheval Blanc. You're after log fires, bearskin rugs and a hotler serving vin chaud, this isn't for you; they are 'functional'.

There is a small living room/kitchen, a bathroom with a little tub and shower, a separate loo and a twin room. Down the hall a ski room opening on to the slopes, where each apartment has a code-locked cupboard. I heard 30 yards up the road

Breathtaking: The slopes above Val Thorens



Pictures: ALAMY / GETTY

How a week's skiing can

SNOW PATROL

SNOW storms followed by periods of sunny weather have been common in Europe this month, resulting in excellent conditions over

