

WINTER DEALS: 15 INDULGENT GETAWAYS

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NEW ZEALAND 101: A FARAWAY LAND UP CLOSE




BUZZ

Top Ten

Ski Resorts For Nonskiers

Lots of ski resorts offer diversions for nonskiers, but these places stand apart as compelling destinations in their own right. Whether the draw is cultural or culinary, or an exceptional spa, no one is left out. The skiing isn't too shabby either. BY BECCA BERGMAN



The Omnia hotel, in Zermatt, Switzerland

1 Zermatt, Switzerland

◀ This world-renowned resort in southwestern Switzerland is a bit of a fantasyland: A ban on gas-powered cars creates a peaceful hush; skiers can schuss into Italy for a pasta lunch; streets are lined with glitzy shops and glamorous nightclubs; and the larger-than-life Matterhorn looms in the background. Zermatt is as fun as its neighbors, St. Moritz and Gstaad, but appreciably less flashy. While still pricey, it offers the best value. During the day, nonskiers can go tandem paragliding, shop the dozens of chic boutiques (wonderfully, the dollar is nearly equal to the Swiss franc), or visit the recently relocated Matterhorn Museum. Come nighttime—or if you want to follow local custom, late afternoon—order an Irish coffee at Elsie's Bar, or stop in for mulled red wine at Igloo Bar, which is made almost entirely of ice.

Splurge: Guests zip up to the lobby of the lofty **Omnia**, Zermatt's first design hotel, via a glass elevator cut into the mountainside. There are 30 large rooms, a lovely indoor-outdoor pool, and an exceptional restaurant. *From \$3,310/week (minimum during high season); the-omnia.com*

Value: The small but airy **Coeur des Alpes** also has its own glass elevator-within-a-mountain entrance, as well as spectacular vistas from every room and suite. This winter, the superpopular hotel will unveil six new lofts (which sleep two to four people), one penthouse flat (for four to six people), and an expanded spa. *From \$257/night; www.coeurdesalpes.ch/e/zimm.htm*

2 Megève, France

Lots of resort towns have good restaurants, but few have as many—that are as good—as Megève. Among the town's clutch of Michelin-rated eateries, the most highly regarded is Flocons de Sel, set in a 19th-century farmhouse. Others include the ingenious La Ferme de Mon Père (get ready for moss mousse); the flagship restaurant of the opulent Châlet du Mont d'Arbois hotel; and the hidden Domaine de la Sasse, which is reached by a 20-minute hike on snowshoes (go for lunch) and specializes in bison. All this is set against

a picture-perfect backdrop, with horses pulling sleighs on cobblestone streets that wind around turreted houses and a 13th-century church. Nonskiers will have plenty of company—many come just for the scene (Jean Cocteau once called Megève the 21st arrondissement of Paris), and even during the high season no one hits the slopes before 11 a.m., while lunch is often an hours-long affair.

Splurge: With a cluster of snug cottages made from reclaimed barn timber and decor that's been described as Heidi-chic, **Fermes de Marie**, the most relaxed of the upper-tier hotels, is known for its incomparable spa. *From \$564/night; fermesdemarie.com*

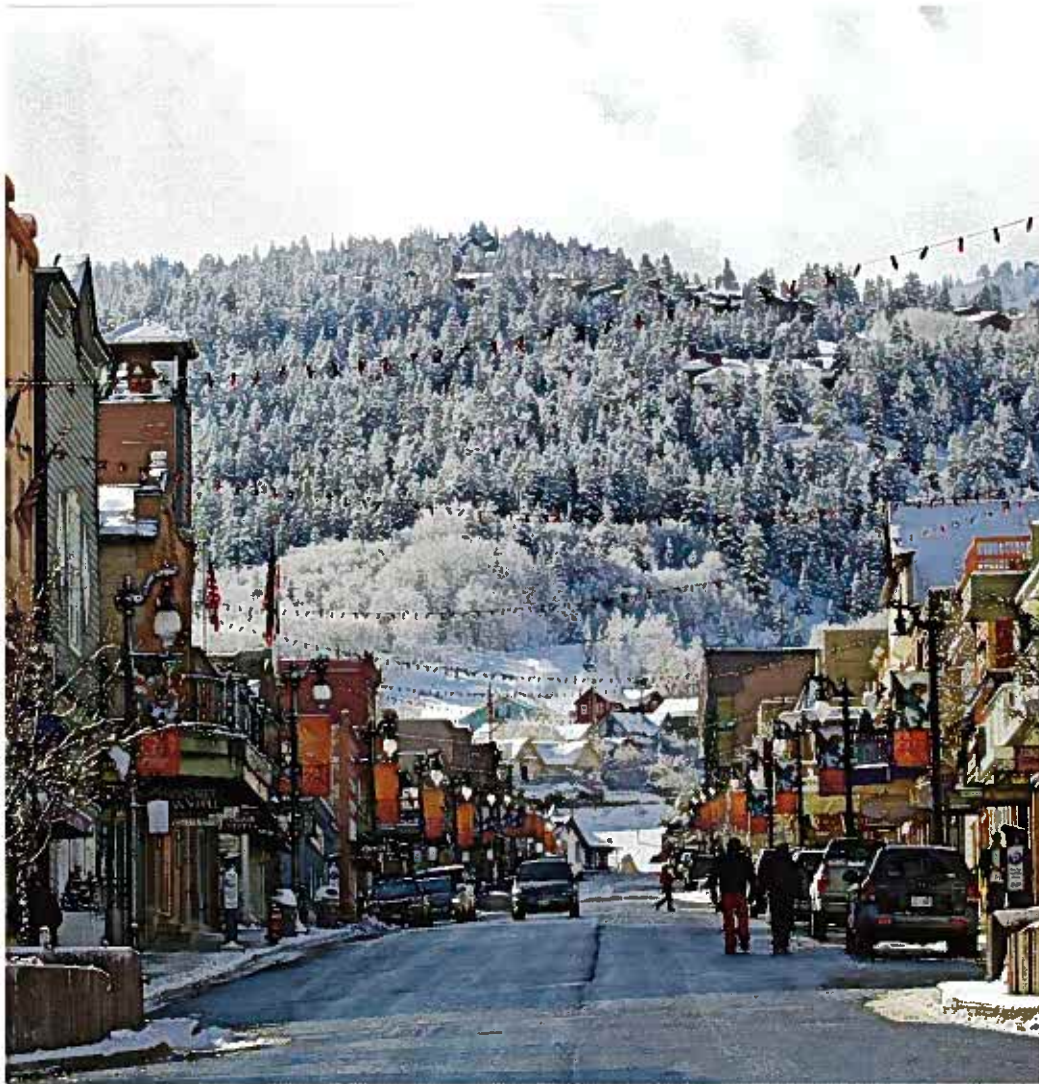
Value: Amid so much extravagance, **Le Gai Soleil** offers a reprieve. It's not posh, but the pine-paneled rooms are cheerful, the staff is charming, and rates include breakfast and dinner. *From \$102/night; le-gai-soleil.fr*

3 Whistler Blackcomb, British Columbia

Already ranked as the top ski resort in North America by *Skiing* for the 11th year running, the spotlight on Whistler Blackcomb will only intensify when it hosts the 2010 Winter Olympics. By this winter, all the construction for the Games is due to be completed, including the new, state-of-the-art Peak 2 Peak gondola that runs between the summits of Whistler and Blackcomb mountains (nonskiers can check it out with a "sightseeing" lift ticket). The village is known for its rowdy nightlife, but it also has refined spots, including the modern French restaurant *Après* and *Elements*, which serves small plates in a low-lit, sleek space.

Splurge: At the grand **Four Seasons Resort Whistler**, the smallest room is still spacious at 500-plus square feet, the *Fifty Two 80 Bistro & Bar* serves up market-fresh seafood, and the spa will quickly have the nonskier blissfully realizing the wisdom of staying off the slopes. *From \$395/night; fourseasons.com/whistler*

Value: Those seeking quiet should try the new **Nita Lake Lodge** on the shores of Nita Lake (there's a free shuttle to the village), a rare boutique hotel amid so many mammoth ones. Decor is sleek but practical (heated bathroom floors, iPod docking stations, high thread count), and there is a just-opened spa. *From \$149/night; nitalakelodge.com*



8 Mont Tremblant, Quebec

▼ Eighty miles north of Montreal, rolling hills mantled with yellow birch and sugar maples unfold into the Laurentian range, crowned by Mont Tremblant.

Tremblant is frequently voted the top resort in eastern North America by *Ski Magazine*—skiers will enjoy wide runs, occasionally dotted with moguls—but it's as much the bustling town that earns accolades as the mountain itself. The pedestrian-friendly village has a rich stock of international restaurants and the most vibrant après-ski scene in the East. Plus, nearby Domaine Saint-Bernard park has some of the world's best cross-country skiing.

Splurge: The **Hotel Quintessence** says indulgence, from the sprawling suites with fluffy featherbeds to the banana caramel compote pancakes at the restaurant and the "four-hands" Swedish massage at the spa.

From \$340/night; hotelquintessence.com

Value: The lakeside, country inn-style **Château Beauvallon** is an excellent high-end option for groups or families—all the rooms are suites and come with two bathrooms, ample sleeping spots, and a fully equipped kitchenette. *From \$213/night; chateaubauvallon.com*

6 Sun Valley, Idaho

In a sea of ski resorts that feel commercial, flashy, or impersonal, Sun Valley and the nearby town of Ketchum maintain a distinctly western charm. While skiers fall in love with the sun-blessed slopes of Mount Baldy, nonskiers can retrace the steps of former residents, paying respects at the grave of Ernest Hemingway, who finished *For Whom the Bell Tolls* while living at the Sun Valley Lodge, and sipping a hot buttered rum at the Duchin Lounge, once frequented by Clark Gable and Ingrid Bergman. The Hemingways and Gables have given way to Eastwoods and Schwarzeneggers, but even the new galleries, spas, and boutiques work in the town's frontier spirit (witness the cowboy boots mingling with Tory Burch flats at Silver Creek Outfitters).

Splurge: The famous Sun Valley Lodge is historic but showing its age. A more refined option is the **Knob Hill Inn**, a retreat on the edge of Ketchum with an old-world European feel. *From \$275/night; knobhillinn.com*

Value: Renting a condo or house is often the smartest way to go in Sun Valley. Try **Premier Resorts** and in particular the Atelier and Wildflower collections, which are near the ski village and serviced by free shuttles to downtown Ketchum. *From \$145/night; premier-sunvalley.com*

7 Park City, Utah

▲ Park City is composed of three adjacent ski areas (Deer Valley, The Canyons, and Park City), with terrain for every skier (including members of the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Olympic team, who train at Park City). The bustling town is good for anyone interested in exploring a rich cultural scene. Fixtures include the Kimball Art Center, a gallery space and site for classes and workshops in photography, ceramics, and more; the historic Egyptian Theatre, which stages locally produced Broadway shows (*The Music Man* runs until December 28); and of course, that film festival known as Sundance, which takes over the town every January. For outdoor pursuits, there's winter fly-fishing, dogsledding, or even bobsledding on the 2002 Winter Olympic track.

Splurge: The **Silver Queen Hotel** and its 12 large, modern suites could not be more convenient—kitchens are fully stocked on request (for a small fee), there's a washer and dryer, and the central location is ideal. *From \$549/night; silverqueenhotel.com*

Value: The **Washington School Inn** is a former 19th-century schoolhouse; claw-foot tubs and velvet drapes add to the quaint feel, while down duvets and in-suite massages up the comfort. *From \$295/night; washingtonschoolinn.com*



FROM TOP: Once a booming silver mining town, Park City has evolved into an epicenter of culture in Utah; suites at the Hotel Quintessence in Mont Tremblant come with wood-burning fireplaces.