

Hit the slopes on shoestring

Want to take the family skiing but don't have the budget? Not to worry – **Conor Power** has DIY, low-cost advice for affordable fun on the slopes

Dreaming of skiing but don't have the budget for it? You're not alone. Although ski tour operators in Ireland are now reporting that numbers are back up to boom-time levels, it still remains an expensive dream for many.

Skiing is one of the most addictive holiday breaks there is, but it's also one of the more expensive. It's not the kind of holiday where you can find a last-minute package to take the family away for two weeks for €1,000, but there are ways of cutting the budget.

Because a strong degree of organisation is involved, the most advisable way to go is to book with one of the Irish ski package specialists, who will be best placed to look after all the elements and ensure you put the "holiday" in "ski holiday".

But if you've already been skiing, then you'll have a clear idea of the various components involved. The key to minimising on cost is to break down the various elements and cut each one of them to the minimum.

What you save on money will be spent in hours trawling through options online but if it means the difference between bringing yourself and your posse to the pistes and staying at home, it might be time well spent.

1. The Flights:

This is a good starting point for your role as your own personal tour operator. Keep an eye on the flight schedules to get the cheapest deals. These days, the cheapest flights tend to be from the location where the greatest choice is (i.e. Dublin Airport), but you may find connecting flights through other airports like London, Paris or Amsterdam that will work out just as cheap.

2. The Destination:

Austria is the most popular country for Irish skiers, followed by France, but there are plenty of very good resorts elsewhere. Italy, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Germany are amongst the countries that people often overlook but where you might find some great deals, particularly in places where the local tourism industry is keen to bring in foreign tourists.

3. The Car Hire:

Shop around online for the cheapest deals and be mindful of the pitfalls: Is your hire price so cheap because there's a huge excess to pay if you have an accident? If you're picking up a car in one country and driving into another, are there any additional costs? For example, if you fly to Geneva (an excellent location to access Alpine slopes), you could be hit with an additional charge of about €45 as soon as you cross the border into France just a few kilometres away.

4. The Accommodation:

If you're prepared to rent a studio apartment (i.e. where you eat and sleep essentially in the same room) and make it a strictly self-catering holiday, then it becomes a lot cheaper. Another tip might be to book in a town close to a public swimming pool. That way, you can get the benefit of après-ski relaxation without paying for accommodation with luxury facilities.

5. The Food:

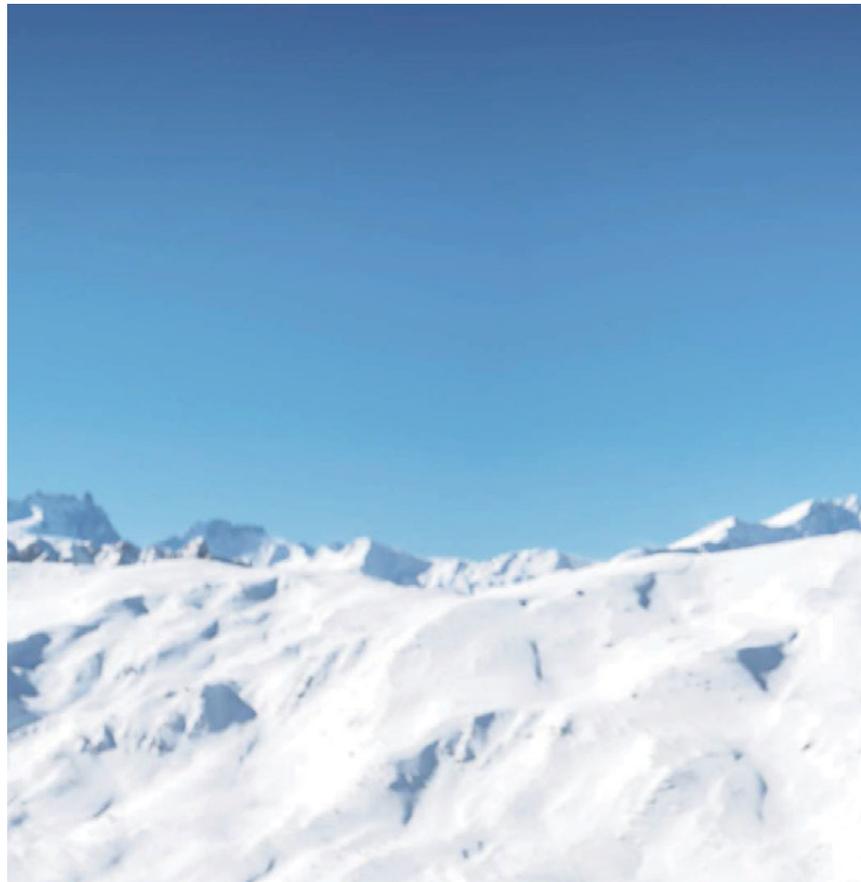
There is simply nowhere cheaper than Aldi or Lidl. They stalk the European landscape like the retail Colossus that they are. You'll find your nearest one by looking it up online or it will almost certainly feature in your sat-nav or smartphone. Make a detailed shopping list and stick to it, stocking up just after you pick up the hired car. If you're bringing children, put aside a hot chocolate budget to compliment the beer/wine/coffee/soft drinks budget for the adults. Include pack lunches every day for the slopes, complete with energy bars for snacking on the mountain.

6. The Ski Hire:

The big tip here is to pre-book your poles, boots and skis as far in advance as possible through one of the online booking agents (Snowell.com is one of the biggest). You can save up to 20% on the cost of one of the more expensive parts of the holiday.

7. The Lift Pass:

As a rule, the fancier the resort, the more



expensive it is. For many of the super resorts in France or the chic traditional Austrian resorts, you can pay up to €850 for a family of five for a week. At the other end of the scale, you can go to Lipno in the heart of fairy-tale Middle Europe in the Czech Republic and avail of its well-equipped 8.5km of ski runs for just €345.

Within France (which has the greatest number of resorts and runs in the world), there is wide cost disparity too, where you could pay €52 per adult per day in Val d'Isère or €32 for the same service in Les Orres in the Southern Alps.

8. The Lessons:

This is probably the greatest variable of all and it's deliberately left out of the equation in the samples below (as are entertainment budgets). In any given resort, there is usually a wide range of people to choose from. Added to that is the variable of

what level you're at and whether or not you feel justified in spending more money on the trip. Some people are determined to improve their skiing with expert tutelage, while others prefer to just do their own thing.

So it's all a matter of doing some detailed research online and paring it down until you get what you're looking for at a price that suits you. The following examples give you some idea of what can be achieved.

They're all based on a family of two adults and three children (aged between 8 and 15) going for a week's holiday in late December just before high season kicks in (i.e. from the 12/13 to the 19/20 December).

Option 1: Car to Morzine, France.

If you actually have your own ski equipment and are prepared to go for a 10-hour drive, then the adventure by car might be the one for you.

The Stena Line ferry (the only direct one



A DIY ski trip can be an affordable option for the family, says Conor Power, below left.



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operating all year round) from Rosslare to Cherbourg is €329. Add to that €220 for diesel, €126 for tolls, €800 for a family ski-pass, €600 for accommodation and €200 for food.
Grand Total: €2,275

Option 2: Fly to Morzine, France.

The more “normal” option to get to a high-end resort with superb facilities. Dublin to Grenoble is €515, car hire is €170, diesel and tolls come to €100, accommodation can be got for €600, a week’s food shop for €200, ski hire for €440 and it’s €800 for the ski pass.
Grand Total: €2,825 *half board, includes breakfast and supper

Option 3: Fly to Jasná, Slovakia.

It’s amongst one of the best resorts in Eastern Europe, where there has been a lot of investment over the last few years. You might spend a bit more on transport, but you save a lot in ski hire and ski passes.

Plus, beer is cheap (under €2 per metric pint). Flights with Ryanair from Dublin to Bratislava for €367, €80 for the diesel, €100 for car hire, €350 for ski hire, €180 for your weekly shop, €660 for the ski pass and €350 for the accommodation.
Grand Total: €2,087

Option 4: Fly to Isola 2000, France.

With 125km of piste, it won’t have the massive choice some of the bigger resorts offer, but it’s more than sufficient for a week’s skiing. Aer Lingus fly to Nice most days throughout the winter and even if you don’t want to hire a car, you can take the special ski resort bus direct from the airport to Isola 2000. With return flights at €560, car hire at €120, fuel costs for €20, ski hire at €395, ski pass for €580, shopping for €200 and studio accommodation for €450, it’s surprisingly economic.
Grand Total: €2,325

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