

Ski Safaris

Hailed as 'touring without tears', the ski safari opens up the world of backcountry. Here are a few of Europe's finest, chosen by four of the best British Mountain Guides

ABONAFIDE SKI SAFARI, as far as the die-hard puritans would have you believe, is a 'journey from one ski resort to another, using any form of transport available - lifts, taxis, buses and even helicopters. The idea is to get in as much skiing as possible, and while most of it will be off-piste, that doesn't mean the occasional piste is ruled out'.

That little gem comes from the introduction to skisafaris.co.uk - the web home of British Mountain Guide Peter Cliff - and with a website like that, he should know!

Often referred to as 'touring without tears', the ski safari

opens up the world of ski touring to those who have no need/desire for uphill exercise.

But, honestly - if taxis and helicopters are fair game, it would seem churlish to completely write off the use of skins, and a little bit of exercise never hurt anyone.

So here we have a whistle-stop tour of the range and variety of adventures that the ski safari can offer. Making no apology for stretching the boundaries of the definition, we range from the very big to the very small; the very expensive to the very energetic. You, your thighs (and of course, your wallet) can decide.

1 SILVRETTA SKI SAFARI FOR SKI SAFARI VIRGINS

Starting at the very small and humble end of the scale is a safari around the resorts of the Austrian Silvretta Alps that, with a little sweat and imagination, can be stretched out into the Arlberg and the off-piste mecca of St Anton. Setting off from the wild and remote Montafon valley, it's possible to ski through the resort of Gaschurn (with its mix of wide open pistes and steeps) and into Partenen to spend the night. An early trip up the Vermuntbahn, and a

ride on the wacky 'tunnel bus' shuttle takes you to the breathtaking vista of Bielerhöhe, with sweeping views across the Silvretta Alps. After a quick coffee in the Piz Buin hotel, a long descent down a pisted road (with a little too much poling - so leave your boarder mates behind) brings you down to the small village resort of Wirl above Galtür. This little lift system has some great terrain, and is high, north-facing and cold - so you'll arrive in time for some powder high up, or the spring snow just starting to turn on the lower slopes. Fill your jacket for the rest of the day!

After a night in Galtür (ideally as a guest of the Lorenz family in the Alpenhotel Tirol) you can hop on the ski bus down to Ischgl. A frantic cruise through the 'Benidorm of Austrian skiing' will see you arrive atop the Visnitz lift to a short boot or skin to the ridge above the Visnitztal. This hidden gem is a steep, long, north-facing valley, rarely visited, and more serious than Crimewatch. If in doubt get a guide to make the decisions for the rest of the day, as dropping in here could easily be the very best, or the very worst choice you ever make.

Get it right and the rewards

are massive, as a 16km run of fresh tracks all the way will spit you out in the tiny village of Kappl. You could end it here with a night in the village, followed by a day on the joyous spring snow and sun-kissed slopes of this teeny lift system - but here's the extra nugget. If you are up for a hefty skin (or wait a couple of seasons until they build the projected lift) you can sneak out of the back col of Kappl, ski the big bowl and skin over the next ridge to join the top end of the legendary Rendl valley. St Anton (and everything that goes with it) awaits!

➔ www.silvretta-montafon.at



Small and humble on the ski safari Richter scale it may be, but the Silvretta Alps serves up plenty of pow

“ A ride on the wacky 'tunnel bus' shuttle takes you to the breathtaking vista of Bielerhöhe ”



MARTIN CHESTER, an instructor at Plas y Brenin (pyb.co.uk) regularly skis all the best terrain from this ski safari, while staying in the finest hotels for the entire week - well, you did say buses were allowed. It's ideal if you fancy an introductory version of a ski safari with all the skiing and less packing.