

Snowsports

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Climate change spells possible meltdown for the ski industry

If you are just about to don your salopettes for another ski season, then you are not alone. Latest research from MINTEL finds that around 1.34 million Brits will take to the slopes this year, up 13% on 2003 figures. But the ongoing problem of climate change means an uncertain future for the ski industry.

Indeed, lower-lying ski resorts are already experiencing changes in weather conditions, with many seeing little or no snow fall in recent years. And the effects are plain to see. Abondance in France closed its ski runs last year, with an estimated 20 other resorts in this region also on the brink of closure. Meanwhile, closer to home, the Scottish ski industry is also struggling with scarcer snow.*

"Although the popularity of snowsports continues to grow, much of the fragile local environment that ski resorts thrive in is under severe threat from development and global warming. And the effects of climate change mean that today's easily accessible, low lying resorts may in fact become a thing of the past," comments Richard Cope, senior travel analyst at MINTEL.

"With many skiers simply not prepared to miss out on their annual fix, we are likely to see committed skiers increasingly choose long haul destinations, looking to higher resorts for guaranteed snow and glacier skiing. But the increase in numbers descending on these more remote destinations may bring its own environmental problems for the surrounding areas," he adds.

Green Skiing

The green revolution is upon us, and whether consumers vote with their feet or not, ski operators must be seen to be doing something towards the environmental issues that affect skiing so obviously and dramatically.

"Green resorts and hotels will appeal to the eco-warrior consumer, who will pay for the honour of "green skiing". Meanwhile, other holiday-makers will be pleased to hear small steps, such as using solar power, are being taken to ease their conscience," comments Richard.

Rail also offers an opportunity for ethically and ecologically sound ski travel, with the potential added bonuses of comfort, space for equipment and a scenic approach. This year, more tour operators than ever are including trains along with other travel options.

Could staying in be the new going out for skiers?

Indoor, or dry slope skiing, could present an alternative to flying abroad for a skiing holiday. The number of indoor ski slopes in the UK continues to rise with around 80 artificial slopes to choose from, and for those who want a more authentic experience, there are now five indoor real snow venues across the country.

"Although indoor skiing presents a real opportunity for the ski industry, there is a danger that it could just become another out of town leisure park activity like bowling. To make sure this works, it is vital that indoor ski venues maintain the connection with real skiing holidays. Companies could look for sponsorship from ski tour operators, while skiers could even be given the opportunity to build up loyalty points and discounts for a future ski trip," comments Richard.

* According to the Ski Club of Great Britain, Scottish skier days have fallen dramatically from 366,000 days skiing since the 2000/01 season to a mere 78,700 in 2006/07.

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