

The crowd-free Spanish ski resort loved by the A-list

Swerve the giants of the Alps in favour of little-known Baqueira Beret, the Iberian elite's favourite winter bolthole



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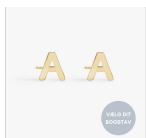


Baqueira Beret is a relaxed ski resort, with luxury residences, a Moët champagne bar – and a restaurant owned by Lionel Messi Credit: Eloy Rodriguez/Getty

Lucy Aspden-Kean
Commissioning Editor

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There's something about the combination of Spanish sunshine and [skiing](#) that feels indulgent – like you've rolled the holiday dice and won. Sat on the sun-drenched terrace of the [Moët Winter Lounge](#) on the slopes above the Spanish ski resort of Baqueira Beret, I really had hit the jackpot.

The lounge is the only outpost of its kind, selling more bottles of the brand's bubbles (€75/£62 for 75cl) than any other bar in [Spain](#). I was amazed to find such a five-star novelty at more than 1,850m, in a [ski resort](#) only a minority of British skiers have heard of.

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Set in the Val d'Aran in the Pyrenees – four hours from Barcelona and two and a half hours from Toulouse – Baqueira Beret is Spain's biggest ski resort, with 170km of slopes. Opened for snow sports in the 1960s, it has long been the winter bounty of the Spanish.

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Under the reign of [Juan Carlos I](#), the Spanish royal family first visited the resort in the 1980s and have returned most seasons ever since. King Felipe is often photographed on the slopes, whose royal connections have turned the resort into “a mandatory stop for politicians, celebrities and jet-setters from all over Spain”.

“The resort has become one of the more [exclusive winter destinations](#) in the south of Europe, where five-star hotels, luxury houses and apartments have

been built in recent years,” says Xavi Ubeira, the resort’s commercial director. He adds that British visitors make up a meagre 3 per cent of winter visitors.



Baqueira Beret in the Pyrenees is a favourite among the Spanish royals Credit: Gonzalo Azumendi/Getty

Despite its loyal local following, skiing in Spain gets a bad rap internationally – particularly among those in search of powder conditions. According to onthesnow.co.uk, Baqueira Beret (1,500m) averages 127cm (50in) of snow each year – compared with 370cm in St Anton (1,305m). However, there I was on a bluebird March spring day, with a metre of snow beneath my feet following 20cm of snowfall overnight – enjoying what local seasonaires told me were “some of the winter’s best conditions”.

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It's this unusual mix of a luxury appeal and surprisingly good skiing that has inspired holiday rental company Emerald Stay to set up a base in the resort. Chalet Timok is its flagship and is part of a new development of 38 high-end residences in the Pleta Arriù area – a prime slopeside position. The properties are all privately owned by “entrepreneurs or discrete, high-profile individuals” and more than half were sold before construction even began.



Chalet Timok is part of a new development of high-end residences in the Pleta Arriù area

“This is the Spanish Courchevel, but it is not a show-off,” said Sergio Castello, the chief executive of Lantana Premium Real Estate, the company behind the development. Having grown up [in Barcelona](#), Castello spent his childhood holidays in Baqueira at his grandparents’ house. “Baqueira is my place,” he told me. Now aged 49, he finally owns his own property here, on the site he’s so passionately worked on for seven years.

Timok’s interior, which spans 450 square metres and five floors, has been immaculately executed by British designer and owner Allison Feldman Egan. It’s minimalist, with underfloor heating, a lift and a spa area with a whirlpool and sauna. The living room has a prime position on the fourth floor with expansive views of the slopes beyond, a roaring fire and sumptuously soft sofas, while the master bedroom, on the top floor, features an inviting bathtub with the same mountainside backdrop.



Chalet Timok’s master bedroom boasts superb views of the slopes and a bathtub

It was almost tempting to forgo skiing to indulge in the delights of Chalet Timok, but that would be to ignore the [real luxury of ski holidays in the Pyrenees](#) – empty slopes, and lots of them. “They [British visitors] are amazed by the size of the resort and the state-of-the-art lifts that we have,” said Xavi. “They don’t expect such a big resort.”

Indeed, over the course of three days I only just managed to touch the edges of the piste map. Highlights included hassle-free laps of the pistes towards the Bonaigua sector, where I cruised crowd-free blue runs until the sun started to set, the top-to-bottom run from Cap de Baqueira (2,500m) back down to the resort (1,500m) on a mixture of open pistes and tree-lined tracks, and skiing the runs below Tuc de Baciver (2,644m), which hosts the planet's most daring skiers on the Freeride World Tour.

I heard few British voices on the lifts (which were free from queues), and found the laidback Spanish skiing style (late starts, long lunches and plenty of time to enjoy another glass of Möet) a welcome change from the scrum of the Alps.



The resort has a laidback, Spanish attitude Credit: Gonzalo Azumendi/Getty

The resort's restaurant scene continued to indulge me off the slopes. Footballing megastar Lionel Messi opened Hotel MiM Baqueira in 2020 and [Hincha](#) – the in-house restaurant run by chef Nandu Jubany – is the place to be seen after dark. Local produce from the Pyrenees is served alongside traditional Argentine cooking and sourdough pizzas. I dined on a tapas-style meal including lobster ravioli and grilled aubergine, before finishing with a cream-filled dessert presented in the shape, naturally, of the Ballon d'Or trophy (Messi is an eight-time winner) – the restaurant's most iconic dish.

The next evening, I visited a crowded [Fandango Baqueira](#), with its car park full of supercars, whose sister restaurant generates similar interest on the island of

Formentera during the summer. I sampled ribeye with rice and piquillo peppers – a twist on the [classic paella](#) – in the cosy interior of the traditional stone property as the snow began to fall outside.

The following lunchtime, from the Moët Winter Lounge terrace, I surveyed the scene. Skiing in Spain might raise a few judgmental eyebrows for the unsuspecting outsider, but those who know Baqueira Beret don't mind. They're comfortable in the knowledge that deep in the Pyrenees lies a place of underrated indulgence, both on and off the piste, without the price tag or ostentatious attitude of the Alps.

Lucy was a guest of Emerald Stay. [Chalet Timok](#) costs from €2,065 per night, for 12 guests, self-catered, including concierge support from Emerald Stay staff. Additional services include breakfast, private chef, transfers and a wine selection. Find out more about Baqueria Beret at [baqueira.es](#)

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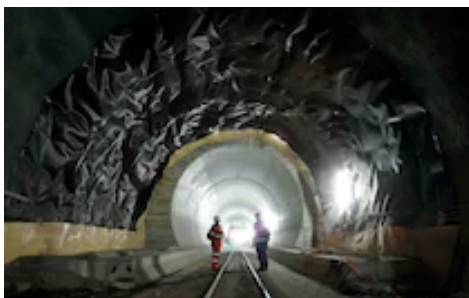
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