

Skiing is great fun and with the advent of low cost airlines and the Eurostar, getting to the slopes has never been cheaper or easier. Britons have always loved to ski but whilst we do get snow up in Aviemore in Scotland it is usually far easier for us Brits to head to the continental Alps to get our winter fix. So, if you've made up your mind and saved up for the flights, accommodation and lift pass it is time to choose your destination, book it up and get on your plane or train.

The following is a step by step guide taking you through how to get skiing for the first time. The best advice is to get instruction as this will teach you how to ski properly; you can either join a beginners group in most resorts, or pay for one on one tuition which will be tailored to your skill level:

Step 1 - Get the Right Gear

You need snow to ski and more often than not snow is cold. Yes, you've probably seen or heard about people skiing in T shirts - or even naked! - but there's very few people that actually do and you can bet your bottom dollar that they have a nice warm chalet and toasty log fire waiting half way down the mountain.

The best advice is to prepare properly to allow you to enjoy your time on the slopes. Some people will skimp on this part and try and wear jeans and cheap waterproofs but they will end up miserable and frankly looking a bit of a boob. With good quality ski wear getting cheaper there's really no point spending your week freezing your backside off for the sake of a few pounds.

At the very minimum you will need a ski jacket, ski pants (salopettes), ski gloves, eye protection, ski socks and a hat. Your jacket and trousers should at a minimum be waterproof. Waterproofing is indicated by the fabric's 'hydrostatic head' – this is a way of measuring a fabric's water penetration resistance and the minimum level actually considered waterproof is 1500mm. Most dedicated ski wear will start at 2000mm for budget clothing and increase with spend.

There is no better rule with ski wear than you get what you pay for; cheaper jackets tend to be bulkier with more padding as more expensive jackets can use better insulating fabrics and therefore offer thinner, trendier designs. Fabric technology has come so far that you can now get a fashionable high street looking jacket that is designed specifically for skiing, so gone are the days of the bulky and traditional ski jacket.

Better ski wear also offers a breathability rating (mvp) meaning you will sweat less, and all sorts of useful features that will all make sense on the mountain like venting zips, stash pockets, lift pass pockets and magnetic closures.

You will need to choose some well insulated gloves that fit well and allow basic movement - the more dextrous the better but you can use mitts if you go to a resort which uses electronic passes as you won't need to keep taking them off to get your lift pass out. Most well established Western European resorts now use electronic machines. Make sure your gloves are waterproof - most good gloves use a waterproof and breathable membrane similar to Gore-Tex.

You will need 2 or 3 pairs of seamless ski socks for a week's skiing. Socks with seams will give you blisters as ski boots are tight fitting and you wear them all day. The most basic option is a formless tube sock and the best advice is to go for a good wool mix as this will help wick moisture away from the skin. Technical socks are seamless tubes shaped to your foot and well worth the extra money as the fit is much more comfortable.

Eye protection - up on the slopes there is often a clear sky with bright sun and this light is also reflected off the snow causing very a bright glare. Most people ski with either wrap-around sunglasses or goggles - sunglasses are great when it's sunny, but pretty poor in blizzard conditions as you just get whited out. Goggles offer the best all round protection but are bulkier and in sunny conditions you will look less cool but you can always stash these in your jacket when not needed. For goggles you should look at a double lens with venting, but avoid mirrored lenses as these don't let in enough light in white out conditions.

Step 2 - Learn How to Walk

Walking in ski boots is an acquired skill but once you practice a little is not too hard. However, walking in skis is another matter entirely. You will need to copy a duck and waddle with the front of the skis pointing outwards. Practice stomping around, sideways up a gentle slope and trying to get anywhere forwards. It's quite difficult, but funny to watch.

Step 3 - Ski a Learner Hill

Often called a bunny hill, this is a small slope set aside for beginners to learn the basic control of skis. There may be a conveyor belt to take you up to the top, or a drag rope. For the belt just step on and concentrate on balancing; for the drag rope keep your weight on the ground and just hold on letting the rope pull you up - if you lean on the rope you will fall (this is the same for button lifts which pull you up by the bum!)

Allow the lift to pull or push you off gently

Step 4 - Ski Down

Learn how to execute a 'snow plough': make a wedge with the tips of your skis pointing towards each other and your weight on the inside edge of each ski. When going down a hill the wider you push your triangle the slower you will travel until you eventually stop. An important thing to note is that the snow plough only really works well on gentler slopes, so you will need to progress to parallel skiing as you tackle harder runs.

To turn gently lean your weight on either leg. Shifting your weight to the right ski will mean you go left and vice versa. Practice this a lot.

Step 5 - Get Braver and Go Up

Once you think you are ready it's time to chance a green run. This is a longer beginners run that will give you the chance to try out some of the things you've learned. Some resorts go straight to blue runs from the learner hill. So, find which chair lift or button lift serves the gentlest run and get on.

Chair lifts basically do all the hard work in skiing so all you have to do is position yourself in front of the seat and let it pick you up. This is where you will have to waddle into position in between the time the current chair leaves and the new chair arrives and is also where inexperienced skiers manage to knock over everyone else. Don't worry, it will get easier with practice but maybe try and go on your own the first couple of times. At the top the chair usually drops you off on a gentle hill allowing you to gracefully glide to a flattish area at the top of a slope - just let the chair push you off and take your weight on your skis.

Do not try and do anything else as you *will* fall over

Difficulty Ratings:

Green - Novice

Blue - Beginner

Red - Intermediate

Black - Advanced

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Double Black - Expert

Green and blue runs will almost always be piste runs with limited obstacles and long wide gentle slopes to practice your turns. Reds can get tricky and may include forest runs and steep slopes. Black runs start to include harder terrain like moguls (bumpy patches), steep slopes, trees, tight turns and generally scary stuff. Double black and diamond runs are insanely difficult and dangerous.

Step 6 - Learn to Parallel Ski

As you get better at getting up and down the slopes you will want to begin to learn to parallel ski as this is the most efficient and easiest way of getting around the mountain. As you descend, gradually try to bring your skis together so that they are parallel to each other. You will need to shift your weight from the inside edges of the skis as it would be in a snow plough, to the same side on both skis.

To turn in parallel you need to flatten your skis on the snow by moving your weight into the middle of the ski which will quickly turn them to face straight down the mountain. This is against all your base instincts so it will take some practice to do it without fear. You then shift your weight to the opposite side from which you were leaning and you will have executed a perfect parallel turn. In correctly fitted ski boots and skis you should be able to shift your weight on your ski with just your little toe!

Step 7 - Make Progress

Try all the blue runs and when you can do them move on to the reds. Like with any sport practice makes perfect and do not be afraid to fall. Drop to the snow on your side if you think you are going to stack it as this will stop you quickly and isn't too painful. Once you can do the reds you should try the black.

Good Luck & Have Fun!

Warning:

- Skiing can be dangerous and it is important that you take safety seriously.
- We recommend that you always wear a snow-sport helmet and only attempt runs that you are comfortable with skiing.
- Do not attempt expert runs with no experience as you will fall and may hurt yourself and others.
- Make sure you are fully covered by a winter sports insurance policy as if things go wrong helicopter rescues tend to be very expensive

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