



French ski resorts cancel winter openings as country goes into second lockdown



The chances of an early-season or Christmas ski holiday in France are looking very slim CREDIT: GETTY

- [Lucy Aspden](#), online ski editor

29 OCTOBER 2020 • 12:28PM

Ski resorts in France have been forced to postpone the start of the winter season as the country prepares to go into a second national lockdown.

On Wednesday night French President Emmanuel Macron announced new rules that prohibit people from leaving their homes unless for essential work or medical reasons. Travel outside their local region is also banned, while non-essential businesses, including restaurants and bars, must close.

The new lockdown will remain in place from October 30 until at least December 1.

Val Thorens, the first major resort to open in the world's largest ski area, Les Trois Vallées, has announced it has cancelled its opening-weekend celebrations and postponed the start of the winter season.

“Tonight the French government announced a national lockdown until December 1. This lockdown does not allow us to open Val Thorens and its ski area as we had foreseen on November 21,” read a statement from the resort last night – it is now contacting all guests due to travel in November.



“For now, the measures are in place until December 1, but it's hard to tell if it will end there,” said Alix Ostyn from the Val Thorens tourist office. While specific measures are due to be revealed by the French Prime Minister this evening there is little information available to resorts, apart from confirmation that the lockdown will be reviewed every two weeks.

Val Thorens is the highest ski resort in Europe and will remain empty until December at least CREDIT: DAVID ANDRE

“What is clear, is that we will be hit harder than other resorts, as we are one of the first to open, so we are missing out on pretty lucrative events and weeks at the start of our season,” said Ostyn. The resort was expecting over 4,000 guests to arrive for its opening weekend – their trips are now cancelled and they will be refunded.

The resort of Tignes has been open for autumn skiing since October 17. Following Macron’s announcement it is closing its slopes on the Grand Mötte glacier this evening, with no clear idea of when it will be allowed to reopen.

Neighbouring Val d’Isere, which is one of the most popular ski resorts for British holidaymakers, was due to open on November 28 – these plans have now been scrapped. Businesses are once again forced to pull down their shutters, a stark reminder of scenes back in March, when resorts were first told to close, cutting last winter’s ski season short by almost two months, as the virus spread across Europe.

“We continue the preparation of the village and the ski area, and make every effort to welcome you as soon as the context is favourable,” read a statement from the resort. “We were ready to welcome skiers and mountain enthusiasts as of November 28. We will be back as soon as the situation permits.”

In his speech the French President said he was hopeful “that families will be able to be reunited for Christmas.” This hope is essential to ski resorts, who look set to miss out on the lucrative festive period if the lockdown is extended into December. Cécile Ferrando, marketing director in Val d’Isere, confirms bookings are already down by 30 per cent across the Alps.

Macron admits the country risks being “overwhelmed by a second wave that no doubt will be harder than the first.” The seven-day case rate has now surpassed 414 people per 100,000 – the country has reported over 35,700 deaths, 244 of which were confirmed yesterday, and over 1.23 million cases.

Skiers will ski for the last time (until December at least) in Les Deux Alpes today too, which has a high-altitude glacier that’s snow-sure for most of the year and was one of the first places to welcome back skiers post-lockdown. “In the coming weeks, the whole station will continue to prepare for the winter season in compliance with the regulations, hoping that the measures taken by the Government will allow us to find ourselves this winter at the heart of the great spaces of the 2 Alps,” wrote the resort on Facebook.

Guests currently in resorts will have to leave by tomorrow as all hospitality businesses close and anybody living in a resort must work from home. Briton Susan Dun lives in Val d’Isere, where she runs the Snowberry equipment hire shop alongside her husband Jock.

“We are hopeful that the lockdown will be the short sharp shock we need and that it will be enough maybe for us to get a half-decent season from Christmas onwards,” she said.



“Everyone is obviously very, very worried. So many people rely almost 100 per cent on the income they make in the winter months and a lot of the businesses here were very badly hit by last season’s close down,” said Dun.

“There are so many unanswered questions. It’s a bit like we’re all playing a million-pound poker game in a pitch dark room with sunglasses, gloves and earplugs, and no-one has told us the rules of the game.”

The news from France comes just days after ski lifts in Italy were banned from operating until November 24, except for professional athletes, under a new emergency decree from the Government.

While, for now, the new lockdown only impacts a minority of resorts that are currently open or were due to open in November, the future of France’s remaining ski resorts hangs in the balance.

The likes of Courchevel, Méribel, Alpe d’Huez, La Rosiere, Chamonix and Les Arcs are all due to open in the first two weeks of December, followed swiftly by the remaining resorts in the French Alps and Pyrenees. Skiers, snowboarders, resort bosses and businesses in these resorts are likely only to find out their fate at the last minute, but those based in France are hopeful these new measures will ensure they can open as planned.

The chances of Britons being able to visit the French slopes this December look slim. Under new rules Britons will be banned from entering the country unless they have a signed certificate saying why they need to travel. The UK’s leading ski operators Crystal Ski has confirmed it will not run holidays to countries and resorts where quarantine or lockdown restrictions are in place or those that are on the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office’s essential-travel-only list, along with operators Inghams, Ski Total and Esprit Ski.

Nick Williams, managing director of Mountain Heaven, which operators catered and self-catered chalets in a number of French resorts, says business is now almost non-existent for the start of the ski season. “As a responsible company we recognise that the start of the season will be very difficult and people need to plan accordingly,” he said.

“To date 90 per cent of all of our December bookings have decided to move due to the huge uncertainty on what the situation will be in December. Bookings for the early part of the season are to be honest non-existent now,” said Williams.