10 of the world's most magical winter holidays – skiing not included

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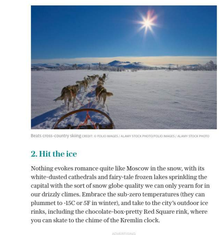
By Lizzie Pook
24 NOVEMBER 2017 • 5:10PM

As winter reaches full swing, hordes of skiers get ready to hurtle down pistes in the Alps and beyond. It's one way to experience the best of winter, but ploughing down a black run isn't everyone's idea of great fun. Luckily, there are plenty of alternatives if you're keen to go on a snow-based holiday but don't fancy the skiing paraphernalia.

1. Release the hounds

Hike through crystalline snow fields, care for and mush your own husky and generally live like the trappers of old on a snowy Norwegian safari. Choose your very own husky from the dog yard and work together to hone your sledding skills, before setting off into the eerie light of the polar night. When the distances in the high Arctic are too great, take to a snowmobile – weaving past narrow frozen riverbeds, through colossal valleys and past ghostly, snow-draped glaciers.

Natural World Safaris (01273 691642; naturalworldsafaris.com) offers an eight-day trip, from £2,995 per person, including meals and accommodation but excluding flights. Departures from January to April.



Arctic cross-country skiing CREDIT: ETHAN DANIELS - ALAMY STOCK PHOTO/PLAINPICTURE IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

2. Hit the ice

Nothing evokes romance quite like Moscow in the snow, with its white-dusted cathedrals and fairy-tale frozen lakes sprinkling the capital with the sort of snow globe quality we can only yearn for in our drizzly climes. Embrace the sub-zero temperatures they can plummet to -15C or 5F in winter), and take to the city's outdoor ice rinks, including the chocolate-box-pretty Red Square rink, where you can skate to the chime of the Kremlin clock.

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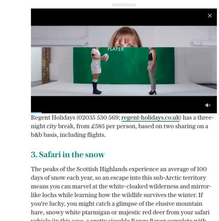
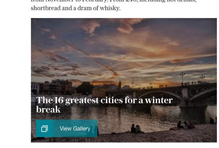


Regent Holidays (02035 530 569; regent-holidays.co.uk) has a three-night city break, from £585 per person, based on two sharing on a b&b basis, including flights.

3. Safari in the snow

The peaks of the Scottish Highlands experience an average of 100 days of snow each year, so an escape into this sub-Arctic territory means you can marvel at the white-cloaked wilderness and mirror-like lochs while learning how the wildlife survives the winter. If you're lucky, you might catch a glimpse of the elusive mountain hare, snowy white ptarmigan or majestic red deer from your safari vehicle (in this case, a pretty sizeable Range Rover complete with monster snow chains).

Highland Safaris (01887 820071; highlandsafaris.net) run daily tours from November to February. From £40, including hot drinks, shortbread and a dram of whisky.



4. Cruise through Christmas

Festive shopping can strike fear into the heart of even the jolliest soul, so escape the sweaty-palmed Christmas Eve rush with a leisurely cruise along the Rhine. With stops at some of France and Germany's twinkliest Christmas markets, visits to castles haunted with history and a chance to learn how to make traditional treats like lebkuchen and stollen, it's Christmas all wrapped up, tied with a bow and sent down the river.

Tauck (0800 810 8020; tauck.co.uk) offers an eight-day cruise, from £2,520 per person, including meals but not flights. Departures on Dec 3 and 10.

Nothing says winter break like building your own igloo CREDIT: ISTOCK

5. Build a home

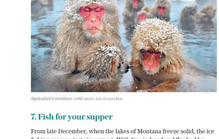
Channel your inner fort-builder by learning how to construct an igloo in the rugged Canadian mountains (and you'd better do a good job; you'll be sleeping in it too). Once you've reached your remote spot by snowshoe, you'll need skill, muscle and sheer grit to carve out your new digs. But with a chance to spot the bewitching Aurora Borealis before you bed down for the night, the graft will be worth it.

Westcoast Adventures (001 604 662 7209; westcoast-adventures.com) offers overnight igloo-building courses in the Vancouver and Whistler area from £260 per person, excluding flights and meals.

6. Walk on the wild side

Japan's mountainous Jigokudani wild monkey park is considered the only place in the world where you can see snow monkeys bathing in the wild. The red-faced macaques spend their days wallowing in the natural hot springs to ward off the harsh winter. An icy clamber up to the springs allows you to get so close to the creatures you'll see the snowflakes on their eyelashes.

Snow Monkey tours (01273 234000; ski4fun.com) depart daily from Dec 16 2017 to Feb 28 2018 and every Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday during March 2018. Ski Safari offers a seven-night stay in Hakuba from £1,575 per person including breakfast, flights and rail transfers.



Jigokudani's monkeys: cold CREDIT: JOEL KIMMAN PHOTO

7. Fish for your supper

From late December, when the lakes of Montana freeze solid, the ice fishing season starts in earnest. With line in hand and flanked by majestic mountain ranges rising like gods in the distance, you'll find yourself in pretty picturesque territory. Hauls are bountiful, too. With mighty Walleye, Yellowstone Cutthroat and pink-bellied Brook Trout up for grabs.

Western & Oriental (0203 733 0333; westernoriental.com) offers a week-long trip from £4,118 per person, including flights, transfers and accommodation on an all-inclusive basis (including ice fishing) at Triple Creek Ranch.

Earn your supper by ice-hole fishing CREDIT: © MARK LAITH/ISTOCK/GETTY

8. Dance with wolves

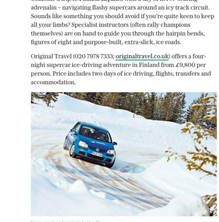
Two hours' drive from Rome, in the isolated valleys of the Apennine mountains, lies the wild and remote Abruzzo National Park. Little visited in winter, the area – where endangered Marsican bears and Italian wolves still roam – is the perfect place for a snowshoe hike. Under falling snow you'll follow wolf and lynx tracks, as their haunting howls ring out throughout the valleys. Be sure to keep your eyes peeled for golden eagles, too.

Ramblers Walking Holidays (01707 331833; ramblersholidays.co.uk) offer a one-week winter walking trip, from £1,125 per person, including return flights, half board accommodation, one lunch and all local transport costs. Departures Feb 4, 11 and 18 2018.

9. Take the wheel

Combine a trip to Finnish Lapland with a day of nerve-searing adrenalin – navigating flashy supercars around an icy track circuit. Sounds like something you should avoid if you're quite keen to keep all your limbs? Specialist instructors (often rally champions themselves) are on hand to guide you through the hairpin bends, figures of eight and purpose-built, extra-slick, ice roads.

Original Travel (020 7978 7333; originaltravel.co.uk) offers a four-night supercar ice-driving adventure in Finland from £9,800 per person. Price includes two days of ice driving, flights, transfers and accommodation.



Nerve-searing adrenalin in Lapland? CREDIT: ISTOCK

10. Catch a wave

Feeling brave? Heli-surfing in snowy Iceland is essentially the sexiest thing you can do in a wetsuit. Arm yourself against the elements and a helicopter will drop you delicately on to the waves, saving you the struggle of swimming out in the sub-zero seas. The North Atlantic not only serves up some incredible surf, you might even spot the towering fins of passing orcas in the distance.

Original Travel (020 7978 7333; originaltravel.co.uk) has a four night heli-ski adventure at Deplar Farm from £7,500 per person, including four hours of helicopter time, flights, transfers and accommodation.