

A season like no other: Winter sports holidays in a pandemic

In a year which no one could have predicted, Club Med examines the effect of the pandemic on the winter 2020 / 2021 season in its eighth annual ski report

Covid-19

Following the early closure of ski resorts around the world earlier in the year, more than half (51%) of frequent skiers (defined as taking a ski / snowboarding holiday in the past two years) didn't go on a winter sports holiday last season owing to it being cancelled due to Covid-19. Encouragingly, the study found that 52% of those who were unable to go last winter have already rebooked for the upcoming season, with 80% of Club Med clients having already rebooked for their ski holiday spanning between December 2020 and April 2021.

While Brits are still intending to get away wherever possible, there are a number of in-resort measures which are now increasingly important factors when they are considering their next holiday. The number one priority for British holidaymakers is that the resort has social distancing measures with 60% saying this is vital, followed by regular cleaning in the resort (50%), accessible hand sanitiser (47%), Covid-19 testing on site (46%) and compulsory use of masks in public places (45%).

Understandably, more than half of all holidaymakers said that they would want the guarantee of a refundable stay (50%) and a Covid-19 insurance policy (57%) before booking future holidays.

The pandemic has also put a spotlight on how and where we work and with this has come an increased amount of flexibility in the workplace and remote working. The study found that 58% of people would now consider working from a ski resort without taking time off to take advantage of being able to work from anywhere.

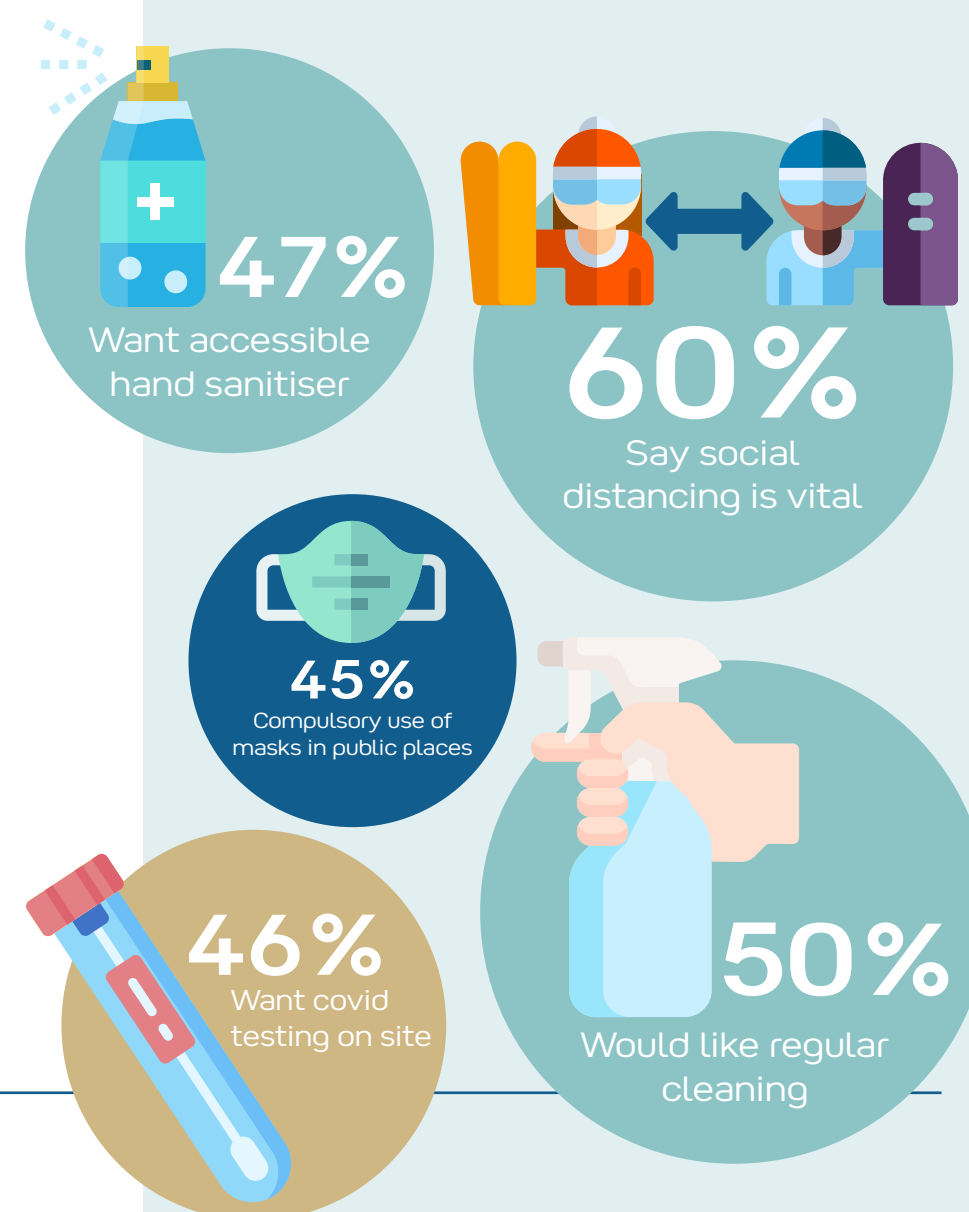
With the situation developing every day, and people's needs changing, the imperative for holiday operators is to provide safety and peace of mind for their guests and be flexible enough to allow for last minute decisions which will surely be the norm for the winter season. Club Med's ['Travel with Confidence'](#) and complimentary [Covid-19 insurance policy](#) ensure that guests are able to book their holiday with the peace of mind that they can amend it at the last minute, get a guaranteed refund and that their medical expenses will be covered if they fell ill with Covid-19 while traveling.

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“We have to recognise and reflect on a year that has been like no other for a whole host of reasons. The global pandemic and its ongoing aftermath has shaken the travel industry on an unparalleled scale. Not only were the impacts of this felt during the 2019 / 2020 ski season, but Covid-19 is still significantly impacting the way in which people travel, what people are booking for the upcoming season and how eco and sustainability credentials play an important part in the overall booking process.”

Estelle Giraudeau, Managing Director,
UK & Northern Europe at Club Med

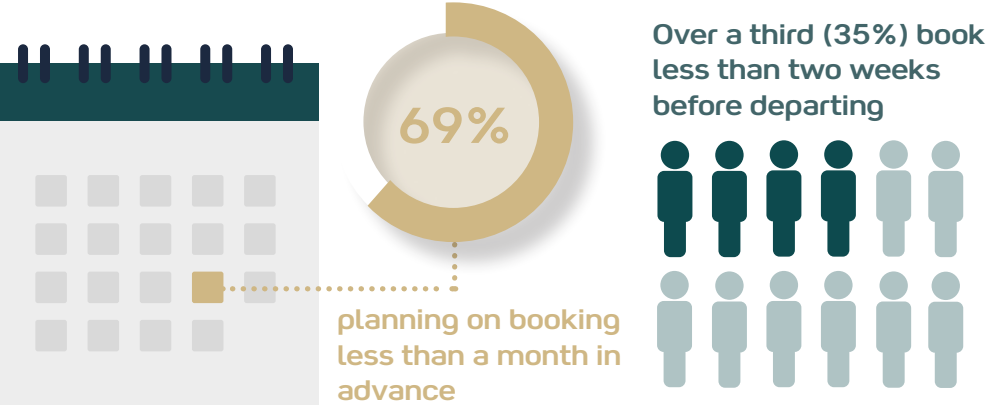
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Booking behaviours

Covid-19 has changed booking habits of travellers around the world and the effects will be felt for many years. Brits' latent desire to travel is still strong, but holidaymakers are having to adapt to ever-changing measures such as quarantine, travel corridors and complicated policies. This is impacting booking behaviours as we approach the 2020 / 2021 ski season.

Traditionally Brits are a nation of planners, but this year half (50%) are booking their winter holiday later with 69% planning on booking less than a month in advance and over a third (35%) less than two weeks before departing. This is in stark contrast to 2019 when only 5% of people booked their winter sports holiday less than three months in advance.



The research revealed that over three quarters (77%) are considering breaks shorter than a week this year and this is further demonstrated by Club Med ski bookings for five days stays, which are up 100% year-on-year - versus only 16% last year. To make up for the shorter breaks, people are spending more money to ensure they have the trip they were dreaming of in recent times. The average order value (AOV) online at Club Med is up by 10% year-on-year as more customers are demanding privacy and space in the current climate, and still have money to spend on holidays that may have been previously allocated elsewhere.

The research supports this finding with 43% being prepared to spend more on this year's winter sports holiday trip compared to previous years.

Almost two in five (38%) said they are planning to take a winter holiday this ski season because they missed out on a summer holiday, with more than one in ten (13%) saying they would be booking a winter sports holiday instead of their usual cruise holiday and almost one in four (24%) mentioning they would be booking a winter sports holiday instead of a long-haul winter sun holiday in 2021.

Destinations

Following the introduction of the travel corridor and quarantine restrictions, potential holiday destinations were among the hot topics of the summer.

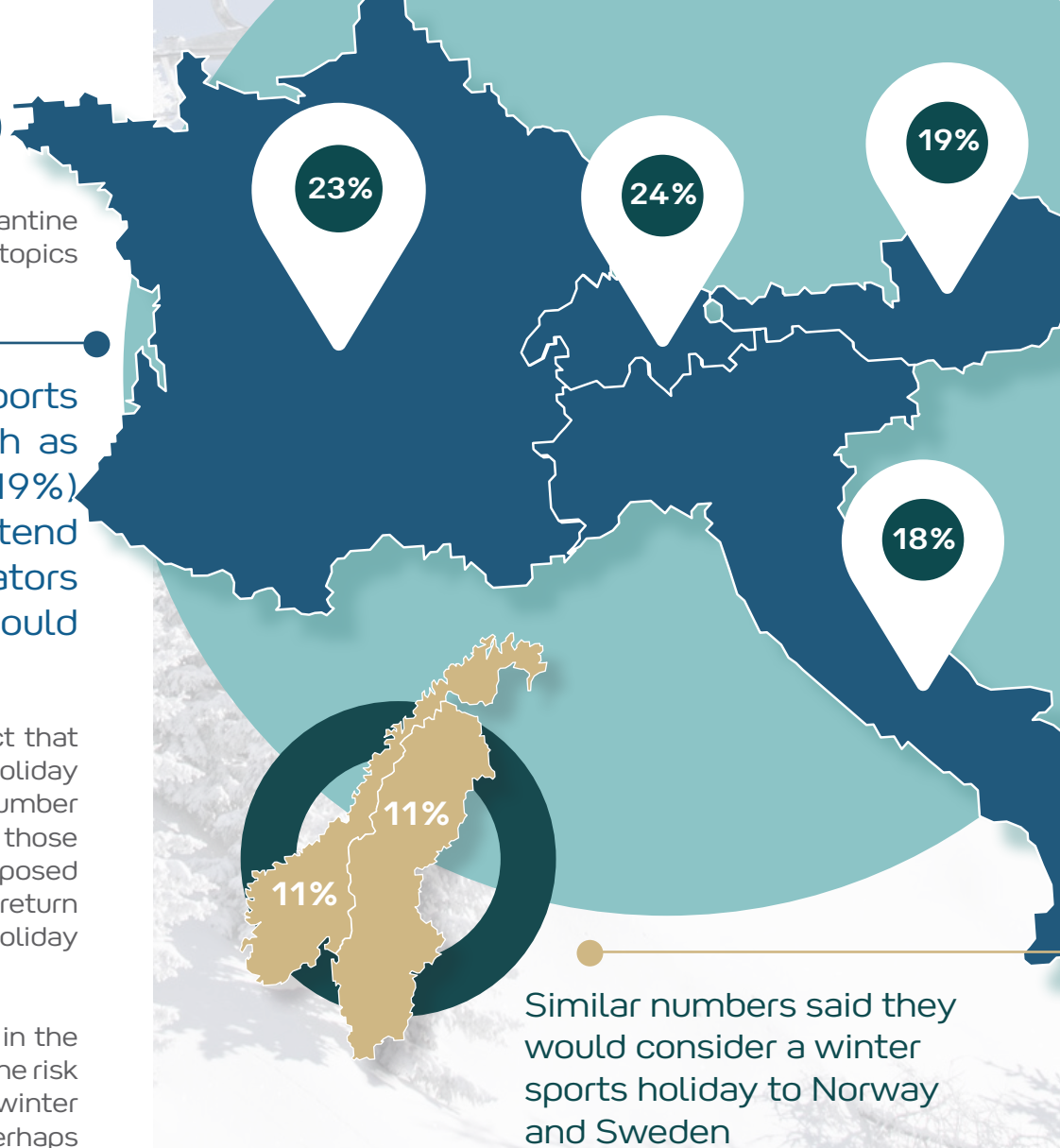
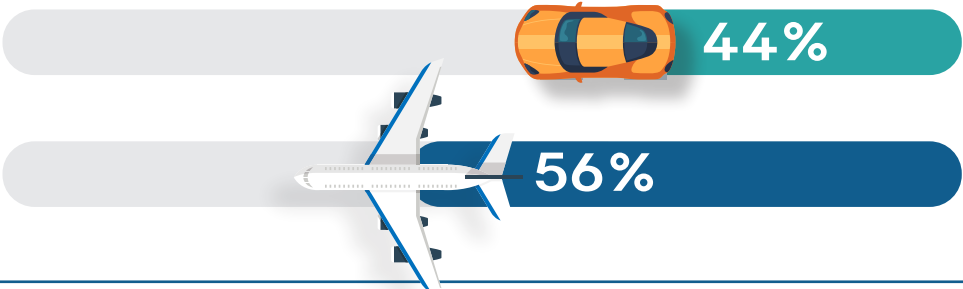
As people look ahead to their winter sports holidays in 2021, traditional destinations such as Switzerland (24%), France (23%), Austria (19%) and Italy (18%) top the table of places Brits intend to go on holiday to, despite some travel operators removing holidays from these destinations should they require travelers to quarantine.

The continued popularity of these destinations reflects the fact that over half (52%) said they would still go on a winter sports holiday even if they had to quarantine on arrival back in the UK - a number which rose to 67% when asked of frequent skiers and 62% of those aged between 16-29. A further 60% also said that the newly proposed 'test and release' scheme, which would reduce quarantine on return to one week, would make them more likely to book a winter holiday regardless of a country's Air Bridge status.

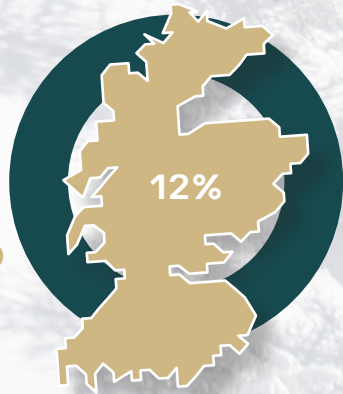
More than one in ten (12%) said they would consider Scotland in the future, as a safe option which wouldn't require quarantine or run the risk of cancellations. Similar numbers said they would consider a winter sports holiday to Norway (11%) and Sweden (11%), which are perhaps more attractive due to the relatively low Covid-19 case numbers in those countries, if and when visiting restrictions are lifted.

Covid-19 has also led people to think about alternative means of transportation, with the worry of flights or quarantine rules being changed at the last minute. The Channel Tunnel and driving has become an increasingly popular choice for winter sports enthusiasts looking for more flexibility.

Research has shown that nearly half are now considering destinations that are easier to drive to avoid flying and hence why European destinations remain strong favourites for Brits.



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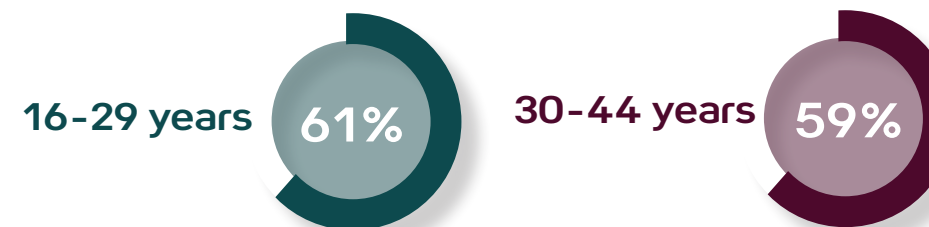


It is clear that more people than ever before are considering driving to their ski destination with this being most apparent for those aged between 45-59 (55%). Almost a third (28%) are considering the ferry as an option and just under one fifth (19%) would consider the Channel Tunnel and train options. With this in mind, Club Med is offering holidays with or without transport to give their customers the upmost flexibility and reassure those who want to travel in the comfort of their own vehicle. Already, Club Med has seen a 10% year-on-year increase in customers booking package holidays without flights.

Sustainability

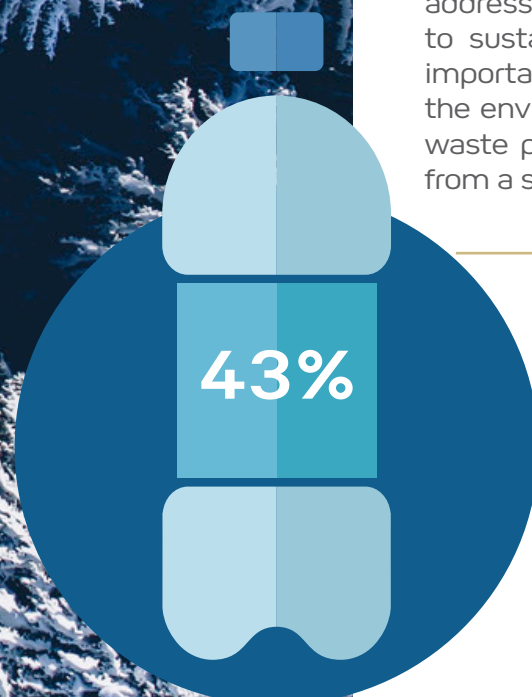
Climate change, animal welfare and nature preservation are just some of the reasons why sustainability has begun to shape the way we travel. We now have more information and knowledge on this topic than ever before and there is an increasing expectation that travel brands have systems in place to protect the future. Everything from implementing widespread energy saving and recycling programmes, to giving back and supporting local communities and the removal of single use plastics are now just a given, and this latent desire to travel more sustainably is becoming more apparent, with 14% of people citing that eco credentials are a deciding factor when booking a holiday.

Specific issues which are important for people when considering what sustainability credentials a resort holds is whether they source their food sustainably, with 39% of people saying this was an important decision maker for them. Other items cited as being important were if the resort had a dedicated food recycling program (29%).



Over half (52%) of those polled consider a resort's sustainability credentials before making a booking, with this being the greatest concern for those aged between 16-29 years (61%) followed by 30-44-year-olds (59%).

Reviewing the travel industry's contribution to climate change and addressing the impact of carbon footprints from construction through to sustaining the day-to-day running of resorts is of paramount importance. Collectively the industry needs to safeguard nature and the environment in which travel brands operate, as well as tackling waste pollution across the board and empower local communities from a social and economic standpoint.



The use of single use plastic is one of the most examined factors when booking a holiday, with two in five (43%) agreeing that they would investigate if a resort had a policy banning this before booking a holiday.



Estelle Giraudeau, Managing Director, UK & Northern Europe at Club Med comments:

"We are still seeing a strong appetite for winter sports holidays and with the last season curtailed, we think that people will be excited to safely get back to the slopes and we are encouraged by the volume of our clients who have booked and rebooked for the upcoming season. It has been a tough time for many this year, and ski holidays are a good way for people to relax and spend a large amount of time in an open environment, so we think holidaymakers are very likely to enjoy their holiday even more than usual.

Reassurance will be key this year and all-inclusive operators have also been at the forefront of Covid-19 protection schemes. In order to ensure our guests still have an enjoyable experience this ski season, we have undertaken a number of stringent health and safety measures which are designed to protect everyone while retaining facilities and activities that are faithful to the Club Med experience. We are also pleased to say that our Cristal International Standards rating is 96% and 100% of our resorts opened during the summer season were certified with the POSI-Check distinction.

We believe the all-inclusive ski holiday model will be more attractive than ever, with customers safe in the knowledge that their holidays are ATOL-protected guaranteeing our customers are not going to be hit with lots of additional costs after booking. With prices and currencies fluctuating in these uncertain times coupled with Brexit due to take place during the upcoming season, locking in a price in advance is more important than ever and will help to provide peace of mind for our customers."