

First French ski reports open, but only at high altitude

November 19 2023, by Amélie HERENSTEIN et Anaïs MARIOTTI



Skiers enjoy the pistes at Val Thorens -- one of the first downhill resorts to open.

A few French high-altitude ski resorts opened ahead of schedule Saturday, just days after storms in the northern Alps wiped out some early snows.

Tignes and Val Thorens, which have many runs above 2,000 meters, were the first downhill resorts to open. Cross country trails opened in Bessans on November 4 while Les Saisies did the same Saturday, but just for a short loop using [snow](#) stored since last winter.

"It is the moment to have fun," said Vincent Lecluyse as he shimmied down a run at Val Thorens.

He had come with two friends from the South of France because "there's not yet much of a crowd and the chalets are cheaper" than in high season.

Other resorts will have to wait. Mild temperatures and [heavy rains](#) hit the Northern Alps earlier this week, washing out much of the snow that had fallen in previous weeks.

"It was important to reassure our clients and tell them that we have snow and that they can come," said Jerome Grellet, director of Val Thorens.

Changeable conditions

After the recent storms, "there is no more snow below 1,500 and 1,700 meters altitude and there has been a decline between 1,500 and 2,500 meters," said Gilles Brunot, director of the Chamonix office of Meteo France, the [national weather service](#).



Many resorts will have to wait after mild temperatures and heavy rains hit the Northern Alps.

"At 2,500 meters there's still quite a bit of snow," he said, "though it is less and less rare to see rain at that elevation even in high season."

Most resorts expect to open in December or for the Christmas holidays, which appear to be well booked.

According to the Association of Mayors of Mountain Resorts (ANMSM), the occupation rate for the first part of the season is already 52 percent, compared with 51 percent at the same time last year.

In recent years, the lack of snow and temperatures too warm for artificial snow have led resorts to offer other activities to keep their visitors busy.

Inflation

Seasonal workers continue to be in short supply, even if less so than in previous years.

"We raised salaries in response to inflation," said Vincenzo Coppola, director of the tourism office in Montgenevre, a ski resort on the Italian border.



Inflation has also hit the industry with ski breaks set to cost some 9.5 percent

more this year than last.



Seasonal workers also remain in short supply.

"But it is true that high rents and a lack of lodging are serious constraints."

Antoine Fatiga, head of the CGT union for ski lift workers, agreed salaries have improved.

But he said [ski resorts](#) are also increasingly bringing in African and Asian workers.

Inflation is likewise a concern for clients. According to the price comparison site Ski Express, skiers should expect their ski break to cost 9.5 percent more this year than last.

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