

## traveltimes VALUE: Don't balk at the Balkans if you like your skiing

## RESORT HAS ALL THE WHITE STUF

### **By NICK REDMAYNE**

PORTS carry with them unspoken social indicators. From football to rugby, tennis to tiddlywinks. definite cliques exist, whether plebs, toffs or geeks, inclusive for some, exclusive to many. For vears, middle-class aspiration realised was the annual ski holiday, trailed months in advance over dinner party fondue, interminable apres-ski reports repeated by smug mountain-tanned couples in between long drags on their Silk Cuts

Or at least that's how it seemed to me, perhaps why I waited until the age of 47 to learn to ski in the resort of Borovets in Bulgaria.

Below dense pine forests and the Balkans' highest peaks, among a hotchpotch of rustic wooden huts and Communist-era hotels, poseurs are notable by their absence – it's all about fun in the snow. About 58km of pistes see beginners progress rewarded by easy 6km green runs, precipitous blues and reds serve those in between.

Borosports (horovets-bg com) ski school has more than 150 instructors. English speakers with the patience of saints. Ski-hire depots lie a minute's walk from hotels, handy when there's awkward gear to carry while wearing finger numbing gloves and ski boots devised as enhanced interrogation. Night skiing is an option and for unfortunates who've lost one ski, or snowboarders, there's the Borosport Snow Park

Accommodation varies from large, dreary hotels to smaller, newer properties. Hotel Rila (rilaborovets. com) falls into the former category, sharing architectural lineage with a multi-storey car park. However, rooms overlooking the slopes have superb views. Friendly staff (yes Bulgarians have learned to smile), a serviceable buffet restaurant and a good a la carte diner, along with a large swimming pool, relaxing Jacuzzis and

Runs for different abilities, with Englishspeaking instructors, comfortable hotels and affordable food and drink make Borovets an ideal destination **Cranial confusion** in Bulgaria nodding one's head means 'No', shaking it means 'Yes'...

muscle-soothing. therapeutic massages in the spa make it grow on you.

In similar style the Samokov (samokov.com) hotel is close to the Yastrebets gondola, for high-level 2363m pistes Elsewhere, the Alpin Hotel

& Villas (alpin-hotel.bg) is small, personal and a little more expensive but still well located

football

scarves are ubiquitous as

are chips with everything.

However, dig a little and hearty Bulgarian dishes

such as kebapche (spicy minced meat sausages), kyufte (spicy minced meat

patties) and lamb cheverme

Eating and drinking is colour coded – there's the Red Lion, Golden Horn, White Magic, Black Tiger, etc... Big-screen TVs and

accompanied by a shopska (tomato, cucumber, onion, raw or roast peppers and Bulgarian cheese) salad and spicy ljutenica (peppers, tomatoes, aubergines, carrots, onion and vegetable oil) relish are there to enjoy. Bulgaria is still the land of the Lev and as such great

value: mains from £5 and large beers less than £2. For traditional cooking, homemade wine and rakia brandy a torchlight forest walk to Blago's family restaurant is a must.

Next season Crystal Ski (crystalski.co.uk) offers a week's half-board at Hotel Rila from £498pp ncluding flights from Glasgow and transfers. A similar family ski package (two adults and two children) costs from

£1992. A six-day lift pass costs £129, ski hire £33 and boots £22. Beginner's ski package including equipment, lift pass and tuition costs £174 (adult) and £129 (child).

Other operators include Balkan Holidays (balkanholidays.co.uk)

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