

# 'tis the season to go skiing

If you fancy more than just a week on the slopes, read on, as Lisa Oxlade finds out what life is like 'sur le piste'

**T**he attractions are plentiful. There's the chance to combine work and play, and revel in sunny skies and snowy slopes, while drinking in the invigorating mountain air. For some, there are opportunities to hobnob with the rich and famous, while everyone gets the chance to enjoy a hot toddy, mulled wine, and après ski.

With winter here, packing up and heading to the slopes to indulge your love of skiing is a tempting scenario and one that, each year, many physiotherapists enjoy. Some work for established practices in ski resorts, while others strike out on their own.

Virginia Williams chose the latter route. She spent two seasons working freelance in Les Gets in France. As she explains, it takes a lot of legwork to get up and running – before and after arriving in the region (see box: Do your homework first, page 24).

Prior to her arrival, she says, 'I contacted all the French physios in the village and the neighbouring village, and was offered two days a week work with one practitioner. Once I was there, with my own kit, I met with all the ski company reps and said I was looking for freelance work.'

But it took a few months before work flowed in from these contacts, and the word spread to others. 'I also did a few odd jobs to meet more people and make contacts; including cooking and working in a crèche.' Her hard work paid off: in her second season, because of all her contacts, she worked entirely for herself.

Despite this success, Virginia's advice to others

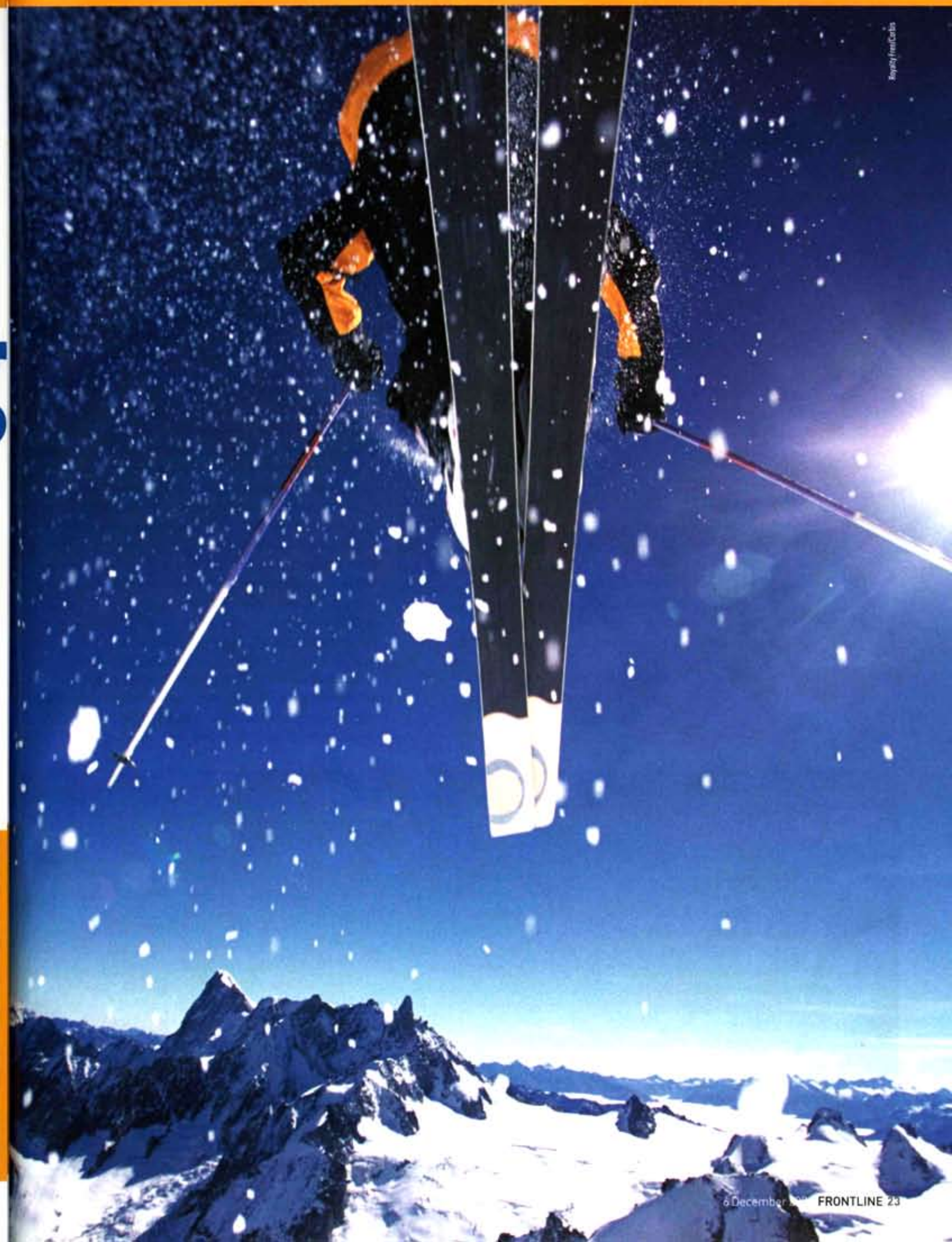
contemplating a season on the slopes is to work initially at an established practice. Doing this, she says, will avoid treading on anyone's toes 'until you know the way things run'.

Siân Lewis concurs. 'My advice is to apply for a job in an existing practice, which will have ironed out any problems and can ensure you are fully registered and legal. You'll also get continuing professional development and senior support,' she says. Siân, together with her husband Chris Maher, runs a business, British Chartered Physiotherapy Clinics, with clinics in Courchevel and Meribel in France.

BCPC has been in operation since 1995, and as well as having static clinics in both resorts, operates a domiciliary service covering other outlying smaller resorts. The clinic is open to the local community and

## Top tips for ski work success

- research the local area, clinics and registration process carefully
- have some knowledge of the local language so you can understand health professionals and patients and they can understand you
- check out registration requirements, insurance and scope of practice issues before you leave
- get some solid musculoskeletal experience at home first, and experience working independently as a first contact practitioner: you need to be confident in your diagnostic skills and know when to refer on
- think about applying for a job in a local practice: they know how things work and have links with other health professionals
- make sure you leave enough time to enjoy the snow



By Getty Images



Life on the slopes: Chris Maher and wife Siân Lewis (inset) operate one of a few UK practices in the French Alps

tourists, and also provides cover for visiting elite teams. It's one of a handful of UK practices in the French Alps.

Ginny Mathisen is one of the six physiotherapists working for BCPC this season. She notes having good links with medical practices, and the support of other practitioners, who have lots of inside information about the resort, are some of the advantages of working for an established practice. Other benefits include easy access to equipment, and help in dealing with the paperwork and the ins and outs of an unfamiliar health system.

#### SKIING IN JULY

Not all physiotherapists who want to ski and work choose to sample Europe's resorts.

Sarah Ross headed down under to go down hill on the slopes, spending two seasons in a sports injury clinic in Lindabyne, in the Snowy Mountains in New South Wales, Australia. Here she treated holidaymakers, as well as elite skiers and snowboarders.

For those on a short break, a speedy return to the slopes is typically the aim, she says, so a rapid diagnosis and immediate management are required. Many people simply want to know what they have done, whether they can continue skiing and what they need to do when they get home. Some will have already seen a doctor in the resort and had x-rays taken, but due to language difficulties, may not be entirely sure what is wrong.

The desire to be seen quickly can be one of the few downsides to the job. 'You need to be able to manage

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SIÂN LEWIS

your time as effectively as possible when you have three patients being treated at the same time, and another four walk in the door,' says Sarah. 'If they're only in town over the weekend you can't turn people away. But as long as you can keep your sense of humour and have good support staff, then you can make it home in the evening with your sanity intact.'

Due to the limited season, a fast return from injury to training and competition was also in demand by the elite skiers and snowboarders she treated. However, with this group of clients, there was also the requirement for a longer-term approach, with screening and injury prevention training a large part of the plan with their coaches', Sarah comments.

Acute knee, ankle, back, neck, wrists and shoulder injuries are common among skiers and snowboarders. But it's not all acute skiing injuries. Some people feel a holiday is the ideal time to resolve longer-standing problems.

'We do get a proportion of chronic spinal problems, for example, when businessmen actually feel they have more time to get their back or neck looked at, hoping to have their 20-year problem cured in their holiday,' notes Siân Lewis. 'We also see post-op orthopaedic patients and some child respiratory patients, as doctors get concerned with the altitude implications in infants.'

While there is a downside to doing a physiotherapy ski season, all those who experience it are clear about the upside. 'The best bit of the job is, without doubt, that ability to ski your way through winter, and seeing daylight, she says. 'Our physios tend to work most evenings and several mornings, but I think they would agree they have plenty of time to get out and play on the mountain. The clientele can be very interesting ... lots of the rich and famous visit the resorts we cover ... and the physiotherapy is dynamic. We can see elite skiers right through to the middle-aged beginner.'

For Virginia, the benefits were both personal and professional. 'I did it to improve my skiing, leave the city and have a really fantastic and different experience, and I learnt some more French as well. I made some good friends, both French and British, and still go back there to ski.' She adds: 'My knowledge of acute injuries and initial treatment was boosted. I think it's a really fantastic experience all round and does your CV no harm.'

If skiing is your thing, who could ask for anything more? Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow. ❄️

FURTHER INFO  
[www.ski-physio.com](http://www.ski-physio.com)

## Do your homework first

Making sure you are practising legally overseas requires plenty of groundwork and can take several months to arrange. Ensuring you are properly registered, know the local legal framework of practice, and are insured is vital before any work at home or abroad.

In Europe, work permits or visas are not required. However, physiotherapists still need to think about registering to practise. Liz Carrington, CSP international development adviser, issues a word of caution about this. 'Members often assume that if they only treat UK nationals in the resort, are employed by a UK

travel company or treat patients in a UK-owned hotel, they can bypass the legal requirements for registration. This is not the case.' The only time this is possible, says Liz, is if a UK physiotherapist is accompanying a UK sports team abroad and only treats UK team members.

Each country has its own registration process. Virginia Williams went through the French system. She notes that although it took a while from contacting the French physiotherapy society through to being registered – about four months – it wasn't a difficult process.

'All my paperwork had to be officially

translated and signed off by the French consulate before I sent it to Paris [for registration]. When my registration came through and once I was in the Alps, I had to go to the regional board to register there. I was then covered by CSP insurance by virtue of being registered.'

Siân Lewis advises that if considering working for a tour operator in a ski resort, make sure to register in the country in order to be insured. She notes the legalities of working for a tour operator are a very grey area.

'I certainly would not take any tour operator's word for it that you are insured. I have spoken to many and they are not aware of the legal working situations for physiotherapists.' Always do your own homework, she advises. 'Do not just rely

on someone else's word; after all it will be your reputation or your CSP registration that will be affected.'

Another important point to consider is making sure you adhere to the local legal framework of practice, as there are variations in scope of practice. Practising illegally means physiotherapists will be breaking the CSP's rules of professional conduct, invalidating their professional liability insurance.

In some countries there are significant differences in terms of relationships with the medical profession and the degree of professional autonomy physios have. There can also be prohibitions regarding treatment modalities: Siân notes physiotherapists are not allowed to practise manipulation

and acupuncture in France.

In addition, under EU directive, practitioners need to be able to understand and make themselves understood in the language of the chosen country. In France, says Liz, registration can sometimes involve passing a language exam. Members should also check with the relevant professional body how referrals are made.

Looking for work on the slopes further afield can be more complicated. 'Anyone wishing to work on a short-term basis over the ski season in New Zealand, Australia, Canada or the US may find it is not cost-effective because passing licensing exams and obtaining visas and work permits could take many months,' Liz explains. 'Exams are only held at

certain times of the year and must be sat in the host country.'

Wherever you go, forward planning ensures you can complete the registration process, and safeguard your professional liability insurance in time for the beginning of the season.

#### FURTHER INFO

The CSP has a series of information files on most countries, and can provide details of geographical restrictions regarding professional liability insurance. Visit the website [www.csp.org.uk](http://www.csp.org.uk) or contact the enquiry handling unit tel: 020 7306 6666, email [enquiries@csp.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@csp.org.uk) Information is also available from the European Region of the World Confederation for Physical Therapy, visit [www.physio-europe.org](http://www.physio-europe.org)