



FRANCE SKIING & MOUNTAINS X 2015-2016 PRESS PACK



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Letter from the editor

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Whatever your level and preference, whether you're looking to ski from first lift to sunset, try a once-in-a-lifetime experience, or take it easy and relax, you're guaranteed to have a great time in France's mountain resorts.



The Alps, Pyrenees, Massif Central, Jura, Vosges...

France is home to five mountain ranges, with characterful villages blending seamlessly with modern ski resorts. The mountains of France are synonymous with snow-sports and are brimming with outstanding high-tech ski areas that cement its position as a leading international destination. Progress is relentless and French resorts continue to invest in improvements on and off the hill, to ensure that the experience meets and exceeds the expectations of an international clientele. Winter 2015-2016 sees plenty of new developments across France's mountain resorts to suit seasoned British skiers, first-timers and non-skiers alike.

France- the number 1 snow-sports destination for British skiers. Despite a Europe-leading 55.3m "skier days" in 2013-2014, France continues to strive for even more comfort, convenience and safety. With fast, modern lifts, France boasts several huge interlinked ski areas with up to 600km of pistes skiable under one lift pass. Within these, zones are put in place dedicated to particular levels and disciplines to enable everyone to get the most out the terrain, whether kids, beginners, freestylers, freeriders and more. Ski passes are available for the day, half-day, per hour or even per lift (e.g. snowpark or beginners' area).

Most resorts are open from December to mid-April, and the highest have seasons running from November through to May. The ongoing #skiingintospring initiative sees resorts lay on fabulous events through March, April and into May, making the spring a fantastic time to visit. The 20,000 instructors at the Ecole du Ski Francaise are some of the most highly qualified in the world and employ the most up-to-date teaching methods to ensure customers get as much as possible from their holidays, whichever activity they choose.

The French mountain experience is in keeping with the French way of life... Whether in a Michelin-starred restaurant or a youth hostel, French mountain gastronomy is prepared by people eager to show off local produce and French culinary know-how, in a warm and welcoming atmosphere. Après-ski continues to become a fundamental element of a ski holiday, and whether an internationally renowned DJ playing to a huge terrace of fellow partyers or a cosy hot-chocolate by a log fire is one's preferred post-pistes pastime, French resorts have turned it all into an art form.

Great times for all of the family in the French mountains. French resorts have the infrastructure to make bringing even the very youngest children a breeze, and put on a raft of entertainment, events and special offers to ensure that children of all ages are well catered for, and at a reasonable price. 44 French mountain resorts carry the "Famille Plus" label: the French national familyfriendly benchmark.

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MAKING THE WORLD'S BEST SKI AREAS BETTER

France is Europe's most popular ski destination and the number 1 choice for British skiers primarily as a result of the size, variety and quality of its ski areas, but that isn't to say French resorts are resting on their laurels. As ever France has invested heavily since last winter on new infrastructure for its ski areas for winter 2015-2016. **334.6m**€ has been spent on making the world's best ski areas better (up 8% from last year).

New lifts will further improve what are already the some of the most efficient lift networks in the world, allowing skiers and snowboarders to spend less time on the lift and more time on the slopes! New pistes will open up parts of ski areas to beginners and intermediate that were previously only accessible to experts. New imaginatively-themed and rigorously-secured learning areas designed with the next generation in mind mean it's never been a better or more fun time to bring kids skiing in France. Here's a pick of the new infrastructure:



An unforgettable experience, night-skiing comes in various guises in France. Here is a selection of the best.



New pistes

- Les 2 Alpes- the completion of a 2-year project sees the inauguration in December 2015 of a new piste Jandri 1, which will allow skiers to ski back to resort on a blue run for the first time.
- Les Menuires- new for December 2015 will be the blue Le Bouquetin run from the summit of the La Masse sector, which hitherto only featured reds.

The pick of the new lifts

- 2 new magic carpets in Meribel, further reinforcing its position as one of the world's premier family ski resorts.
- New 6-man Brochaux chairlift in Morzine-Avoriaz will carry 3000 skiers and hour
- New 10-man bubble from Plagne Montalbert

will dramatically improve access to the rest of the Paradiski area with 2800 skiers/hour compared to the 1800/hour carried by the previous double chair.

• Val d'Isère has announced plans for 10-man Solaise bubble to open in December 2016, increasing capacity



to 3600 skiers/hour (one of the highest in the world), and also featuring heated seats and free wifi

New kids's area and slow zone

• Les Arcs Mille 8- Les Cabanes piste is accessible to skiers of all levels and features a giant Xylophone and BBQ area, whilst "Les Pingouins" kids piste features a toboggan run, igloo, penguins and a mini-snowpark, as well as its own dedicated magic carpet.

New snow-making facilities

- Alpe d'Huez has added 33 new snow cannons, at a cost of 1.65m€, to La Sarenne piste (world's longest black run) taking the total number to 101 cannons top-bottom.
- Saint Sorlin d'Arves has added 60 snow-cannons: Sainte Foy Tarentaise has 10 new cannons.



Many people find that a day on the slopes in France is quite enough excitement for one day exactly as it is. But equally others are increasingly on the lookout for new ways to enjoy and expand upon their ski experience, or for one-off adventures to add an exclamation mark to their holiday. French resorts are constantly looking to the future in this regard.

Night-skiing

• Floodlit: Chamrousse opens the La Croix bubble in the evenings allowing top-bottom (600m vertical) of floodlit skiing above the city lights of Grenoble. Also available in La Tania.

- Full Moon: Every full moon, Les 2 Alpes organises a "Full Moon Party". Skiers stay up the mountain for dinner and ski down by the light of the moon. Also in Vars.
- Headlamps: The Sarenne by night in Alpe d'Hueza descent lit by head-lamps of the world's longest black run- should be on every skier's bucket-list.

First & last track

Different approaches to skiing

Go up with the ski patrol at the crack of dawn, get an insight as to what being a ski-patroller entails as

> they make the slopes safe to open and then have glorious first tracks down when they do. Available in Les Menuires. Saint Gervais Mont-Blanc and Méribel. The same can be tried in **Courchevel**, but in reverse- stay up the mountain when the pistes close and help the ski patrol close the pistes before skiing off into the sunset!

Heading off piste

The rise in popularity off freeride skiing off-piste has been meteoric. France, with its huge variety of terrain and high snow-sure ski

areas, is blessed with some of the world's best offpiste skiing, for everyone from the intermediate skier looking to dip their toe into the powder for the first time to the hardcore powder-hound! All of France's resorts offer introductions to skiing off-piste with a guide from ESF or a local ski school.

Those looking for a truly wild and unique freeride experience should look no further than La Grave in the Alps and its Pyrenean twin, the **Pic du Midi**. Both are 100% off-piste areas offering huge amounts of lift-accessed off-piste terrain guaranteed to get the adrenaline pumping and represent a dramatically different ski experience.

Learn ski-touring

Also becoming hugely popular among those looking for a more authentic mountain experience is ski-touring. Skiers and snowboarders use special equipment to move uphill away from the pistes and into the backcountry, before skiing down wonderfully untouched descents. Châtel, Arêches-Beaufort, Montgenèvre, and Serre Chevalier are among the resorts who offer accessible packages, for intermediates and up, to try ski-touring. For added flavour, night-time ski-touring is offered in Val Cenis and Val Thorens.

NEW AND UNFORGETTABLE NON-SKI ACTIVITIES

France's mountain resorts recognise that not everyone wants to be on the slopes all day every day of their holiday, and continue to expand their offering to ensure that there is no shortage of alternatives for those looking for a change of speed.

Snow-shoeing:

- Walking in the mountains on snow-shoes is a great way to enjoy the gentler mountains of Monts-Jura (in the Jura), **Besse-Super-Besse** (in the Massif Central) and **Gérardmer** (in the Vosges). Also available in many other resorts.
- In the Alps, Praz de Lys Sommand organises a "Raquette & Raclette" evening, involving a walk on snow-shoes at sunset, before being rewarded with a traditional Savoyard dinner (Raclette).

Huskies:

- Tignes organises evenings for groups to walk the huskies up to a base-camp at 2250m for an aperitif in an igloo and dinner in a yurt.
- Val Cenis has a wide range of husky-sled adventures from 30-minute taster outings to 3-day expeditions into the Vanoise National Park, during which guests learn to drive the husky-sled themselves.
- Various other husky-drawn adventures available in most French resorts.



Electric Ice-driving: Both Val \times NFW \times d'Isère and La Clusaz have ice-circuits with 100% electric vehicles.



Hot-water canyoning: Canyoning (swimming down rivers, sliding off waterfalls etc. in a padded wetsuit) is normally a summer mountain pursuit, but in Font-Romeu in the Pyrenees, the geothermally heated river water makes this exhilarating water-sport possible in the depths of winter!

Ruisseling: Like ice-climbing but more easily accessible, participants climb frozen rivers with specia crampons, in Les Contamines Montjoie and Orcières-Merlettes 1850.

Ice-diving at night: A truly ethereal experience. In a special dry-suit, scuba-dive beneath the ice in **Bessans** and **Tignes** as night falls.



Bun-j ride: ski or snowboard off a giant ramp into the void, attached to a bungee cord... on a zip wire! Available in **Tignes** and **Saint Jean de Sixt**, not for the faint of heart!

Llama & Alpaca walks: Dogs may be a man's best friend, but these 4-legged friends in Valloire are a huge hit with kids who can take them for a walk.

Snake-glisse: slide down the pistes after the lifts close in the "snake-glisse", a specially adapted toboggan linking up to 15 people. Great for groups of kids and available in, among many others, Puy Saint Vincent and Les Orres.

XNEW Yukigassen (snowball fights):

Inspired by the popular Japanese sport, Avoriaz and Morillon are among the resorts to introduce epic team snowball fights in specially designed arenas filled with obstacles, pumping soundsystems and atmospheric lighting. Everyone loves a snowball fight, why not make it official?

• Val Cenis: 4* Hotel Le Saint-Charles. Opening in December 2015, Val Cenis' first 4* hotel Le Saint-Charles features 55 hotel rooms and 38 apartments and is located in the authentic village of Lanslebourg. • Val d'Isère: 5* Hotel Le Yule opens December 2015. Decorated in a cosy-chic Scandinavian style and



New accommodation

• Châtel: 1861 Hostel. This new hostel opened in July 2015, ideally located between Châtel village and ski lift hub at Pré de la Joux. The relaxed and wellappointed hostel is sure to be a big hit with skiers and snowboarders on a budget in winter.

• Samoëns: 4* CGH Chalets de Laÿssia. 55 self-catered apartments of 2-5 bedrooms open in December 2015 in the heart of the charming village. The complex features a swimming pool, sauna, hammam, massage therapist and fitness studio for the use of its guests. • Tignes: 4* Hotel Le Taos. Inspired by the American Wild West. Le Taos features both hotel rooms and self-catered apartments. Opening in December 2015, the hotel is ski-in-ski-out and located in the heart of Tignes le Lac.

NEW & IMPROVED ACCOMMODATION FOR ANY BUDGET

France's mountain resorts have accommodation options to suit every taste and budget. Winter 2015-2016 sees the opening of a host of exciting new addresses, from youth hostels to self-catered apartments right up to 5* hotels, to complement the wide and eclectic range of existing accommodation available in the French mountains.

situated on the snow-front bang in the centre of town, Le Yule's 41 rooms benefit from some of the best views in the Alps.

• Val Thorens: 5* Hotel Pashmina offers everything from hotel rooms to apartments to private catered chalets, even a glass igloo on the roof where you can sleep under the stars! Opening in December 2015, the Pashmina features two gastronomic restaurants and a 400m² L'Occitane Spa.

New Trend: Treehouses

The French mountains are home to some fabulous treehouses where you'll feel like you're in Sherwood

Forest, in a house designed by J.R. Tolkein, only you'll be in France! Montgenèvre in the southern French Alps, La Bresse and Gérardmer in the Vosges and Grand Tourmalet in the Pyrenees are home to some of the finest examples. They are all fully heated and equipped, open all year round and sure to be a huge hit for

families and those looking to rediscover their youth!

Touch the stars

The **Pic du Midi** observatory on the summit of the mountain of the same name in the Pyrenees was where NASA mapped the surface of the moon in 1963 for the Apollo missions. The observatory is still open to the public, and now also features 15 boutique bedrooms. Guests can eat a traditional dinner, gaze at the stars through the observatory's telescopes (situated in one of the world's 9 International Dark Sky Reserves) before spending the night on top of the Pyrenees!





Staying connected on the clopes

Whether it's to share one's experiences on social media with friends, or (for better or for worse) being available for urgent work-related business, staying connected has become indispensable to the modern holiday. French resorts have recognised the demand and this year sees the introduction of a number of new initiatives with these considerations in mind.



Wifi on the slopes

- Méribel: free wifi in the ski area. Accessible at the picnic area and ski-pass desks at Chaudannes, on the Plan de l'Homme chairlift and at the summit of Saulire.
- Les Gets: Pocket wifi devices available to rent. allowing up to 10 devices to connect to free & unlimited high-speed internet anywhere in the resort of across the Portes du Soleil ski area.

Selfies!

- Val Cenis: A panoramic photo system installed at the 2800m summit of the ski area automatically takes your photo in hi-res, which you can then download for free.
- Avoriaz Selfie Tour: A map gives you the top ten selfie spots across the ski area, each featuring a panel indicating the name of the spot. A free app then allows your images to be posted on the tourist office's "Community Wall".

Video selfies!

• Megève: on the Mont d'Arbois sector, skiers can be speed-tested, photographed and filmed, with the resulting content shareable on social media.

• Videoparks: Les Gets, Les Menuires, Val Thorens, Valberg and Vars all have variations on video & sharing technology. The bottom line being that if you're doing something rad in the snowpark, it will be captured from multiple angles allowing riders to share to their heart's content (and maybe their friends' jealously)!



• Dublin-Geneva, Swiss, 4 flights/week, from 29€ each way, Launched June 2015, year-round service.





France is the most accessible major mountain destination for British skiers. Flights routes from all over the UK and Ireland service the 15 key access airports to France's 5 major mountain ranges: The Alps, Pyrenees, Massif Central, Jura and Vosges. Regular bus services are in place connecting those airports with their nearby resorts. Those that prefer to travel by land and maximise their time on the hill can choose from direct trains to the heart of the French mountains, or via Paris for a change of flavour en-route! Winter 2015-2016 sees the introduction of even more travel routes, meaning more choice than ever.



New flight routes

• Manchester-Lyon, Jet 2, 1 (Saturday) flight/week, from £38.70 each way. Launches 19/12/2015, until 09/04/2016

• Cardiff-Chambery, Flybe, 1 (Saturday) flight/week, from £24.99 each way. Launches 19/12/2015, until 26/03/2015

• London City-Chambery: British Airways Cityflyer has increased midweek capacity on this existing route in response to increased demand for short ski breaks. • London Stansted-Grenoble: Ryanair has added a second Saturday flight for winter 2015-2016.

 London Gatwick & Manchester-Grenoble: Monarch has added a second weekly (now Saturdays and Sundays) service from both Manchester and Gatwick to Grenoble for winter 2015-2016.

New direct Eurostar London-Lyon

1 service/week will run on Saturdays, from £89 return Launched May 2015, year-round service. A real gamechanger for train travel to the French Alps, this route is worth considering for 3 reasons:

1. Some resorts hitherto reached by changing station in Paris can now be reached simply by changing platform in Lyon. And though changing station in Paris is easy when you do it by taxi, the simple change of platform in Lyon is certainly easier still.

2. Even for resorts that are already accessed by the direct Eurostar Ski Train to the French Alps, this new route via Lyon adds capacity, meaning that on peak dates when the direct Ski Train is sold out, the route via Lyon might have seats available or better pricing. 3. You can use the Lyon route on the outbound to create a Saturday night stopover in Lyon, if the accommodation is Sunday-Sunday, a city-break/ski combo option that

ought to appeal to foodies in particular!

For comprehensive information about train travel to the French mountains from the UK, visit www.snowcarbon.co.uk

To book a train journey to the French mountains from start-finish, see **www.voyages-sncf.com**

Bus transfers

www.altibus.com is the information portal and booking website grouping France's alpine bus transfer companies. Transfers can be booked from the airports of Geneva, Lyon and Chambery, as well as from 20 major train stations, to 80 resorts in the French Alps.

• New for 2015-2016: up to 25% off fares when booking online, and reservations now possible right up to departure.







Being home to many of the world's biggest and best resorts and ski areas, it's only natural that France should play host to a raft of world-class events. From the pinnacle of international snow-sports competition to fun events that anyone can participate in, French mountain resorts have something for everyone.

Ski & Snowboard Events

- FIS Skicross World Cup, Val Thorens 11th-12th December 2015. Surely the most spectacular ski-racing event there is, Val Thorens is the spiritual home of Skicross and this is one of the biggest events on the World Cup circuit.
- Red Bull Linecatcher, Les Arcs January 2016 (date TBC). A spectacular event bringing together the world's best freestyle and freeride skiers who compete on a course off-piste featuring man-made and natural jumps.



- Frostgun Invitational, Val d'Isère 16-18 February 2015 The most prestigious freestyle ski and snowboard big air event in Europe makes for an astonishing spectacle and features many of the world's top DJ's for the after-parties.
- Poney Session, Saint-Lary Soulan February 2016 (Date TBC). One of the highlights of the World Snowboard Tour year, Poney Session is an outstanding exhibition and celebration of world-class snowboarding in the Pyrenees, with awesome parties to boot!
- Skicolour, Les Gets 12th March. Inspired by the Colour Run, skiers ski down a specially-prepared course, engulfed in explosions of coloured paint!

Non-Ski Events

- Rise Festival, Les 2 Alpes 12th-19th December 2015. After being a big hit in its first year, this predominantly-dance music festival returns to the party-friendly resort of Les 2 Alpes.
- La Grande Odyssée Savoie Mont-Blanc, 9th-20th January. This epic dog-sled race passes through 12 French resorts across the Savoie-Mont-Blanc region. A fabulous spectator spectacle, particularly for kids, it goes through: Samoëns, Les Carroz, Sixt Fer à Cheval, Praz de Lys-Sommand, Les Gets, Megève, Val Cenis, Bessans, Aussois and Bramans.
- International Ice and Snow Sculptures Competition, Valloire 12th-15th & 19th-22nd January 2016. The world's

best sculptors carve fairytale-like sculptures out of huge blocks of snow and ice. The resulting works are displayed in the village afterwards.

- International Pyrotechnic Art Festival, Courchevel 11th February-7th March 2016. This month-long celebration sees an astonishing display once a week for a month by the world's foremost pyrotechnical artists.
- European Snow Pride, Tignes 12th-19th March 2016. Tignes plays host again to Europe's biggest LGBT festival on snow.
- Rock the Pistes, Les Gets, Morzine-Avoriaz, Châtel, 12th-19th March 2016. Now into its 6th year, the free music festival features big-name acts playing on stages on the pistes across the Portes du Soleil ski area.
- Skiing into Spring, March, April, May 2016: Many resorts organise fantastic events between mid-March and early-May to celebrate this wonderful time of year to ski, details of which will be available as the winter progresses.















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