

ADRIAN HOGG left the snow behind at home for even more snow in the French Alps

My holiday

IT was only lunchtime on the second day, but already we had run out of superlatives.

Since our arrival, just about every other word seemed to have been “fantastic”, “superb”, “unbelievable” or “magnificent” so instead we did the only thing possible - shut up and, with one last look at the fantastic scenery, set off on another superb run down an unbelievably empty piste in magnificent condition.

To a non-skier, leaving behind Britain's heaviest snowfall in decades in order to slide down French mountains may seem eccentric to say the least, but to anyone else it was, well, superb.

We had travelled to Courchevel, part of the Three Valleys complex of France's Savoie region, the “largest skiable area in the world” and only some two-and-a-half hours drive from Geneva airport.

Childish excitement

Despite ingrained boyhood memories of skiing through horizontal rain in Scotland, I always set off full of childish excitement, even if I am half expecting to be told “you should have been here last week” or “the forecast is great for a fortnight's time” when I arrive, but even the harshest of critics would find nothing to carp about the conditions this time.

The tone was set from the moment of our arrival in Courchevel 1550, one of a number of mini-resorts clustered around the valley (the number refers to the height).

We were to be guests of skipower.co.uk in one of a number of chalets they have in the area. Ours, Sylvie, was one of a pair built by a local hotel owner for his daughters and after one look round the collective thought was “Do you think he'd adopt me?”

Cooking to die for

One thing that was not down to pot luck, but rather to skipower and the individuals themselves was the standard of care.

Each chalet has a “host” who is also the chef and an assistant and in Iain and Sophie we again could not have asked for more: cooking to die for, great personalities, and royal



ON THE PISTE: The Boulevard Du Lac Bleu at Courchevel
PICTURE: Courchevel Tourisme/Jérôme Kélag

Snow business

Places to see

- **La Taiga restaurant - we visited nearby Tania village to try this excellent restaurant which also hosts two very funny British stand-up comics.**
- **People watch - there are some seriously rich visitors, some famous and some accompanied by tough-looking Russian gentlemen.**
- **Works by the great Surrealist artist Dalí are on show throughout the resort.**
- **The Bubble, a popular bar in 1650 with the Brits, with a lively atmosphere, often including theme nights such as “The 80s”.**
- **Travel round - a free bus service runs between the various resorts of Courchevel.**

treatment of the guests - whether it be serving the nightly champagne and canapes, or keeping the supplies of free wine topped up - they felt more like part of the group than staff.

Ultimately, however, it was the skiing that was going to make or break this holiday. We had the best snow and sunshine many could remember, but even in the poorer of conditions, Courchevel has it made. 150kms of piste of its own and linked to another 510 or so in the rest of the Three Valleys, even the most demanding skier would find plenty to entertain them.

Gentle green runs, sweeping blues and reds, and I-really-can't-bear-to-look-blacks, all linked by an efficient lift system, the Three Valleys has it all. In abundance.

The only problem is likely to be deciding where to go, but we didn't even have to worry about that as another of skipower's great benefits is its free ski hosting service.

It being France, there is probably some law against calling someone a ski guide unless they have spent 300 years training in Chamonix or somesuch, but that is essentially what the hosts do. They pop along to ask where you would like to go, ability levels etc and guide - sorry host - you accordingly!

Prayers were answered

One thing the hosts don't claim to offer is qualified instruction. I have skied for years to a reasonable standard, but have long wanted to brush up my skills while having a probably totally unreasonable determination to avoid the ubiquitous ESF (Ecole Du Ski Français).

Finally on this trip I found the answer to my prayers. Well, two actually, in New Generation and Magic, both well established local outfits which offer lessons in either small groups or on an individual basis.

Both were excellent. Patient, yet not afraid of pushing clients when they felt it was appropriate, we

TravelFacts

- **We were guests of skipower, which offers a range of holidays in Courchevel and other resorts. Details from www.skipower.co.uk**
- **Geneva airport is only a short drive away.**
- **New Generation ski school: Book online at www.skinewgen.com before you go or contact them on arrival. Magic ski school: Again can be booked from the UK via www.magicfr.com or contacted after arrival.**
- **Courchevel 1550 is one of a number of resort towns within the Courchevel Valley, most named after their height above sea level. It is part of the Three Valleys, in France's Savoie region. More info from www.courchevel.com**

could actually feel our confidence and skills grow after their careful tutelage.

Appetite for dinner

The one thing you WON'T be happy with is the prices in bars and restaurants. With a rubbish pound to euro exchange rate and Russian oligarchs and assorted other millionaires holed up nearby, it ain't cheap to eat on the slopes, but hey, you can always claim you're on a health kick and just ski more!

It will leave you with more of an appetite for dinner which believe me is no bad thing...