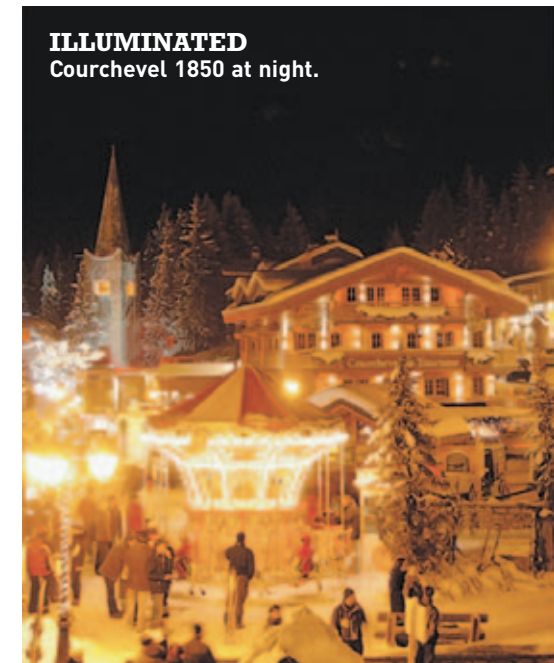


# Hit the Slopes



**IN THE THICK OF IT** La Croisette in Courchevel 1850 – the hub of the resort.



**ILLUMINATED** Courchevel 1850 at night.

## FRANCESCA CRAGGS enjoys the high life, and a spot of skiing, in Courchevel – the heart of Les Trois Vallées.

**I**T RESEMBLED the scene from the film *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (minus the sugar pink ski suit, of course).

I had spectacularly lost control on the children's slalom and was heading for the trees. How do you do that snow plough manoeuvre again?

It was but a minor blip in my quest to become a more competent skier.

And what better place to learn than the world's largest linked ski area – the Trois Vallées in France?

At the hub of this spectacular landscape is the affluent resort of Courchevel, which was the base for our week-long trip.

We'd arrived the previous evening following a pleasant two-hour easyjet flight from Newcastle to Geneva.

A cheerful representative from our tour operator, Ski Power, was waiting in the terminal to whisk us over the border into France.

Actually, "whisk" may have been a slight exaggeration. The transfer is around three hours, but we were more than comfortable in the modern air-conditioned Ski Power mini-bus and enjoyed enthusiastic banter with our fellow holidaymakers.

We climbed the pretty mountain roads, via picture-perfect villages, towards

our destination. Spread over five levels, Courchevel offers something different on every one.

Saint Bon, the original village at 1,100m, Le Praz, complete with its majestic Olympic jumping hills, at 1300m, and Courchevel at 1550m.

Perfect for both families and revellers, this quaint village offers excellent value for money.

You'll find a good selection of hotels and catered chalets, as well as a handful of bars and restaurants.

Our accommodation for the week was Ski Power's luxurious Chalet Sylvie, just a stone's throw from the gondola providing direct



**LUXURY BASE** Ski Power's stunning catered Chalet Sylvie in Courchevel 1550 – Francesca's fantastic home for the week.

access to Courchevel 1850 and the entire Trois Vallées ski area.

Built last year, the chalet offers a stunning mix of comfort and style. There are four double en suite bedrooms, which sleep up to eight, and a beautiful open-plan living/dining area complete with log-burning fire. It was the perfect Alpine retreat.

We arrived at dusk to a welcome glass of Champagne and a cosy seat by the fire.

While chalet chef Ian and his assistant Sophie prepared our evening meal, staff from nearby ski-hire company, Ski Higher, popped in to kit us out.

A helmet was top of my list. It may have been bright blue and slightly uncool looking, but I wouldn't recommend hitting the slopes without one.

Whether it's booking ski or

snowboard lessons, buying a mountain pass, hiring ski equipment or even indulging in a massage, Ski Power can organise it all. You don't even have to leave the comfort of the chalet!

Every evening, guests are treated to Champagne and canapes, a beautiful five-course meal, followed by Port and cheese. What's more, quality wine from a nearby vineyard was available on tap. I could get used to that!

After a hearty breakfast cooked to order by Ian, we squeezed into our ski boots and shuffled up the mountain in our designer attire for our first ski lesson.

It's just a short gondola ride to Courchevel 1850 and the vista is simply stunning. And so was Marco – our Sicilian ski instructor.

With highly-qualified instructors across France and Switzerland, New Generation Ski and Snowboard School is a British venture and all lessons are taught in English. To a fashion anyway.

Marco was not only patient, but an excellent teacher. By the end of the week we'd mastered a couple of blue runs and progressed to level three. He even took us off-piste. Well, through some trees and over a bump anyway.

The linked ski area of the Courchevel valley includes 304 acres of mountain entirely dedicated to all types of winter sports.

Le Trois Vallées offers 600km of prepared and maintained pistes, with runs accessible to all levels. Out of the 330 runs, 13% are green, 39% blue, 38% red and 10% black.

### TRAVEL FACTS

A WEEK-long break in Chalet Sylvie, Courchevel 1550, costs from £349 per person, based on two people sharing. Includes seven nights' catered chalet accommodation (breakfast, afternoon tea and five-course evening meal six days a week). Flights and transfers extra. Call Ski Power tel: 01737 306029 or visit [www.skipower.co.uk](http://www.skipower.co.uk)  
Ski lessons provided by New

Generation Ski and Snowboard School. To book visit [www.skinewgen.com](http://www.skinewgen.com)  
Francesca flew from Newcastle to Geneva with easyJet. Flights costs from £23.99, [www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com)  
A week adult ski pass for Courchevel Valley costs €216. Les 3 Vallées costs €267.  
For more information visit [www.courchevel.com](http://www.courchevel.com)

There's also some great themed zones, ranging from a Red Indian piste for children to the Funny zone designed with the adrenaline junkie in mind.

We hit on a fabulous week weather-wise. The snow was powder perfect and the views over the Swiss and Italian Alps were breathtaking.

Problems with my toe (it's rather bent and didn't get on with my ski boot) forced me to retire from the slopes after our daily two-hour lessons. It was hard work sipping vin chaud in the sun, watching the fur-clad

Russian set go by, but somebody had to do it.

The higher you go up the mountain, the more expensive it is. The Chopard jewellery shop and Valentino boutique were dead giveaways.

Food and drink in La Croisette, the hub of 1850, were pricey. A small hot chocolate with cream set us back €6, a glass of vin chaud €6.50, and a small beer €5.50.

Lunch in the resort creperie, which comprised two cheese and ham galettes, and two small beers each, came to around €60.

Although expensive, they were delicious and the atmosphere was priceless. Courchevel 1550 was more reasonable and we enjoyed lunch in

**SURREAL** Dali's iconic *Dance of Time* sculpture – one of 14 of his famous works exhibited within the resort and pistes.



the local pizzeria for around €35, including drinks.

Courchevel is host to a number of events throughout the 2010 season, including an exhibition of original Dali sculptures no less. The resort resembled an open-air museum with some of his best-known creations peppered around the resort and ski runs.

After each afternoon of hard drinking, err... skiing, we returned to the chalet to find afternoon tea complete with Ian's delicious homemade cakes. Perfect.

Après ski goes hand in hand with the sport and Courchevel offers something for everyone. With just a couple of bars and restaurants, Courchevel 1550 is a little on the quiet side.

However, those wishing to party the night away will find a livelier vibe in the nearby resort of Courchevel 1650. Just a 10-minute ride on the free ski bus, the resort features myriad nightspots including the Bubble Bar and Funky Fox.

Nearby La Tania is also great for an evening out. You'll find some good-quality restaurants, including La Taiga.

It not only serves stunning food, but also hosts a number of themed party nights including a stand-up comedy gig, which was particularly entertaining.

Having totally caught the (après) ski bug, I'm definitely not going to leave it another decade before hitting the slopes (bars).

And for that added touch of luxury, a catered chalet is top of my list.

### READER TRAVEL

**ROME:** Four-star "free bar" city break from Newcastle airport. Departs June 4, July 2 & September 3 2010 from £369pp  
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- Three nights bed and continental breakfast accommodation at the four-star Excel Montemario hotel (single room supplement applies)
- Two-hour free bar on each night
- Tour manager

To request a complimentary colour Rome City break brochure telephone The Journal Reader Travel Department on 0191 2016000 or Newmarket Promotions on 0845 2267751 visit [www.newmarket.travel/nec15990](http://www.newmarket.travel/nec15990) or call into ncjMedia, Groat Market, Newcastle.