

Popular French ski destination is perfect places to slope off to for a fun long weekend of skiing, with 14 resorts to choose from to suit all levels

FIONA RUSSELL

Snowy Portes of call



OUT AND ABOUT Picturesque resort of Avoriaz



CHALET GIRL Fiona stayed at The Retreat



OFF PISTE Avoriaz is lovely at night time

A long-weekend European skiing break with three friends seemed mad – but when I found out how easy it is to reach the Portes du Soleil area in France, I decided to give it a try.

From Edinburgh or Glasgow, the flight to Geneva in Switzerland is just more than two hours, followed by an efficient 90-minute bus transfer to Morzine, a historic ski town at the heart of the wider ski area.

The neighbouring resorts of Les Gets and Avoriaz also offer great options for easy-access short breaks. Les Portes du Soleil – “the doors of the sun” – encompasses 14 resorts between Mont Blanc in France and Lake Geneva in Switzerland.

One lift pass covers two countries, 14 holiday resorts, 650km of pistes, 196 ski lifts, seven snowparks, three halfpipes, four boarder-cross, four snow-cross and hundreds of kilometres of off-piste skiing.

The range of graded ski runs makes it a good destination for all abilities and ideal for a family ski holiday.

Portes du Soleil has 162 easy runs, 106 intermediate level runs and 28 runs for the more experienced. If you only explored one or two resorts you’d rarely be bored over a week’s skiing.

But we had only four days so rarely skied the same piste twice. While Ali

and Gill opted to stay in a smart boutique hotel in Morzine town, Ellen and I went for a catered chalet.

Chalets are great for meeting new people and it’s very relaxing to have breakfasts, afternoon tea and evening meals in the set price.

Our chalet, The Retreat, was located in a peaceful location close to the neighbouring resort of Avoriaz.

Thanks to the dedicated private bus service we could choose each day whether to start in Avoriaz or Morzine and where we wanted to be picked up.

After referring to a Portes du Soleil phone app, we decided to start each day in a different resort then see where the fancy took us. So day one, with only the afternoon for skiing after an early morning flight, took us to our closest resort, Avoriaz.

With only four hours for skiing, we bought a local half-day ski lift pass for about 33 euros – much cheaper than the full Portes du Soleil pass. As luck would have it, a large dump of snow came down the first night of our stay.

Skiing a long weekend meant we enjoyed much less busy weekday slopes and on some pistes we felt like we were the only skiers.

There are plenty of pistes to recommend including, from the top of Arare, the blue-graded Bleue d’Arare, Bleue de Lac and Stade d’Arare. The lift to Chavanette also offers a couple of great runs, Bleue de Chavanette and the red Les Lanches.

Later in the trip, we combined a morning in Avoriaz with a ski over the border, via 2277m high Pointe de Moissette, into neighbouring

Champéry. The Champéry slopes were long with the option to join together two red runs with a short black section.

For thrill seekers, there’s one of Europe’s tougher mogul fields to attempt. The notorious “Swiss Wall” links France to Switzerland on 300m of some of the toughest bumps about.

On another day, Ellen and I started in Morzine, joining Ali and Gill on a whistle-stop tour of almost all the areas in the large family-friendly resort and neighbouring Les Gets.

Half of Morzine’s slopes are rated beginner or intermediate, although there are some more challenging pistes if you have the urge.

Morzine is one of the lowest of the resorts in area but, with easy access to the higher resorts of Les Gets and the usually quiet Mont Chery, poorer snow conditions are rarely a problem.

Ali, who has visited Morzine and Les Gets many times, whizzed us around some of her favourite areas, including the pistes below Pointe de Nyon – the high point of the Morzine domain at 2012m – and Chamossière.

A must-do ski run is the longest Chamossière-Morzine, rated red and blue, of 11km.

On the final day, I tried to extend my skiing day to the max. I started in Morzine, skied my fill there and at Les Gets then took a bus to the Prodains Express, a high-speed lift that takes skiers to the higher slopes of Avoriaz.

With the light dimming, I had to make a dash to ski several slopes and connecting chairlifts between the Express and my lift back to the chalet.

Travel info

■ **Based on two people for three nights at The Retreat, Morzine, including Glasgow flights, transfers, fully catered (one staff night off) the price is from £595pp. Call Flexiski on 020 8939 0864 or visit www.flexiski.com**

■ **EasyJet offer flights from Glasgow and Edinburgh to Geneva. www.easyjet.com/en/**

■ **Airport transfers by www.skiidygonzales.com and www.mountaindropoffs.com**

■ **www.bluebirdskirental.com, is the place for ski and boot hire.**

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