

Snow-bound!

Les 2 Alpes

by Peter Garwood

Following last issue's report on Le Sauze in the southern French Alps, the contrast couldn't be much greater. 2 Alpes is not for those seeking the tranquillity of the traditional Alpine village. Summer, autumn and winter activities abound in this buzzing resort. It's big and busy, with a lively après-ski scene, and thrives throughout the year - you can even ski and board on the glacier up to the end of August (as well as during the half-term week, around the end of October). The prices of holiday rentals and property are modest in comparison to the likes of the Savoyard '3 Valleys'. In fact, if you want chic, look elsewhere - LDA is neither Courchevel, nor Megève. This lack of pretence is a major factor in the good-natured, welcoming ambiance of the resort, and is reflected in the friendliness of the people I came across from its sizeable British ex-pat community.

Les Deux Alpes is one of France's largest, and most progressive alpine holiday destinations. Just over an hour from Grenoble, the domain stretches from 1600m up to Europe's biggest skiable glacier at 3600m. Combined with the renowned off-piste skiing of La Grave, as well as one of the world's most extensive dedicated snowboarding areas up on the glacier, the resort caters for all gliding tastes.

Our host for the autumn half-term break - Jeremy Edwards of the European Ski School. No - not just one of best sources of ski and snowboarding tuition in the resort, but also the owner of the extremely comfortable adjoining Le Cret Hotel, as well as the

'Secret Bar', a lively and popular après ski haunt. Jeremy's goal is to ensure all guests feel completely at home in Les Deux Alpes, and he certainly provided us with an all-round, quality service during our stay. Jeremy works with Dave Morris (of our 'Ski Tips' column), and the skiing and boarding lessons are top quality, irrespective of your level of ability, from beginner, to race training for experts. It just seems that the smaller, privately-run ski schools make a bigger effort to please - which makes complete business sense. After all, we are supposed to be having an enjoyable holiday - and they want us to come back for more!

The 'Toussaint' autumn week is not the quietest time to pick for a break in the resort. We arrived in the middle of the World Snowboard Show (*Mondial du Surf*), a long weekend dedicated to all types of boarding events, the centrepiece being the big top housing a vast selection of the latest products to try or buy. For three days LDA brimmed with baby-faced, baggy-trousered boarders, many of whom didn't seem the least bit interested in sleeping, or allowing anyone else to sleep... bear this in mind when booking accommodation in the busy periods, especially if you have kids! Three days' respite followed their exodus en masse late on the Monday, along with the sweet-smelling, smoky haze that had been clinging to the resort despite the glorious sunshine, and which mysteriously dissipated around the same time...

The World Ski Show (*Mondial du Ski*) opened on the Friday, attended by an entirely different breed of snow sport animal, who



The European Ski School

to our great relief didn't feel compelled to shout and scream in the streets around the town centre at 4 a.m. More products to try, races and other events up on the glacier and in LDA itself, big names from free ride and other disciplines signing autographs, the bars and clubs humming into the early hours... even without the dawn yodelling competitions the resort maintained its reputation as a big party town, through to the Sunday night.

The writer has spent the past few winters trailing round the French Alps behind fanatical children bent on spending every possible moment gliding the slopes - and getting left further and further behind! Foolishly, I have never taken more than a few token lessons myself, despite first taking up the sport in my forties. Not entirely my own fault - I was lumbered with a couple of surly, disinterested instructors from the E.S.F. national ski school in Courchevel, as a complete beginner - and they almost managed to put me off for good. Still, watching the kids with quite a variety of instructors over the years has been a lesson in itself... and based on this experience I would stress the importance of obtaining the best tuition - both for you, and for your children. No doubt that the E.S.F. does have a number of accomplished linguists on their books - it's just that I haven't met any of them yet! (I reckon that to qualify as an 'English-speaking instructor' at a French Ski School you just have to demonstrate your fluency in a hundred words of English... in no particular order, and not all of them printable). To be fair, in the biggest resorts the E.S.F. does have a few Anglophone instructors, but they are few and far between. No such problems in Les Deux Alpes - Jeremy and James of the European Ski School, Dave at Snow Pro, Charlotte Swift of Easiski are all top quality, and just as important, fun people to learn to ski with. And just so as not to be accused of Francophobia!.. Anne Millet, of Ski Privilège, a former member of the French World Cup Squad, is one of our favourite teachers, with great English (having spent a number of years as an instructor in the States).

I've lived in France for nine years now, and my kids are bilingual. In fact they're undoubtedly more French than English, much as I hate



On top of the world



On the quad trail

SNOW-BOUND! LES DEUX ALPES

to admit it! But it's no coincidence that a disproportionate amount of the lessons they've most enjoyed have been with British instructors. On the whole our experience has been that tuition is cheaper, groups are smaller, and the instructors more amenable. They put their all into ensuring you come away a better skier... and are already thinking about booking next year's trip.

TO SKI, OR NOT TO SKI...

Even if you don't fancy skiing day in, day out, you can always try 'racquettes' (snow shoe walks), paragliding, climbing ice waterfalls, quads, snowbikes, pay a visit to the 'grottes de glace', the ice grotto dug out of the glacier and the highest and largest in the world, full of the most fascinating ice sculptures. You can even try a trip to the nearby Alpe d'Huez resort by helicopter for £30 or so, quite a bargain day out, or spend the night with the family 10,000 feet up in an igloo - the Kanata village provides you with your meal, bedding and breakfast for 39 euros (23 euros children). Don't worry if you can't ski - all the facilities on the glacier are accessible on foot, the funicular and a tracked minibus taking you on the *Croisière Blanche* to the peak of the Dôme de la Lauze at 11,000 feet, and a truly magnificent panorama.



Breakfast at Le Cret Hotel



The Ice Grotto, 30 m. inside the glacier

"Surveys also reveal more and more tourists wishing to spend time on activities other than skiing or snowboarding during their holidays in the Alpine resorts", according to Christophe Pech of the Tourist Office. "Investment across the board ensures Deux Alpes stays firmly in the vanguard of those Alpine destinations offering the broadest possible range of other facilities to its visitors". This is no idle advertising spin either. Three summer trips to LDA over the last three years, and we're still a long way from trying everything. Through the warmer months the possibilities seem endless - the only limitation being the level of personal bravery (or foolhardiness) - and so far I've drawn the line at bungee jumping from cable cars! After getting up early so as not to miss the best conditions for glacier skiing (by lunchtime it can get rather slushy), the kids are back in town and ready for more; the summer bob track (the brakes are not just for show), trailbiking, grass skiing, white water rafting, the nearby adventure park... in fact, think of a sporting pastime, and the odds are it will be available somewhere either in or within easy reach of the resort.

All can be booked through the European Ski School, which offers apartment accommodation in a recently-built, luxury complex, Les Flocons d'Or***, just a few minutes stroll from the E.S.S. and sixteen en suite rooms in the newly refurbished Le Cret Hotel. The hotel has special low season rates, with club discounts, and free places for large group bookings. Half-board is priced from a very reasonable £25 per head, with superb Italian and continental cuisine on offer in the restaurant. The Ski School tuition rates, as well as those of the other instructors (*see fact file*), are excellent value in the summer. For those of you whose French didn't progress much further than "*La plume de ma tante est dans le jardin*", who hesitate to take up a sport involving complicated travel arrangements abroad, who would feel more comfortable being taught to ski by a fellow Brit, who need reassurance that their children will be in the company of people who really understand their needs, look no further - Les 2 Alpes is perfect, and Jeremy Edwards of the E.S.S. will guide you through all the arrangements you need to make.

LES 2 ALPES FACT FILE

Buzz (www.buzzaway.com) flies into Grenoble airport throughout the winter, just 45 miles and little more than an hour's drive from the resort. A quick check at random of flights available in January revealed one way tickets for as little as £16!

Les 2 Alpes Tourist Office: www.les2alpes.com

SKI SCHOOLS:

EUROPEAN SKI SCHOOL (AND LE CRET HOTEL) - JEREMY EDWARDS
tel and fax: +33 (0)476 79 74 55
www.europeanskischool.co.uk
europeanskischool@worldonline.fr

SNOW PRO - DAVE MORRIS
www.snowpro.co.uk / dave@snowpro.co.uk

EASISKI - CHARLOTTE SWIFT
www.easiski.com / enquiries@easiski.com

SKI PRIVILÈGE - ANNE MILLET
tel. +33 (0)6.09.69.87.78
http://anne.millet.free.fr/a_milli@club-internet.fr