

3 RESORTS 2 WAYS

Just because your children are in ski school, doesn't mean you can't go off-piste powder-hounding, too
LOUISE HALL *discovers three family-friendly*

Booking a family ski holiday is never easy, but when you're after an affordable option to suit beginners to experts, it's always going to be a challenge. If you are a good skier/boarder, it's common to fall into a pattern of booking a holiday that keeps the kids happy, ensuring they improve, while you cruise without pushing your limits. Yet we all know that the best ski holiday is when everyone's having a blast.

With this brief in mind, we've found three Tarentaise Valley resorts – a well-known deliverer (Val d'Isère) and two lesser-known off-piste gems (Sainte Foy and La Rosière) – with something to suit all levels and budgets. With lots of easy and quick lift-access off-piste, they're places where you can hire a mountain guide to go get your powder-hounding fix while the kids are in ski school and still be back in time for pick-up.



VAL D'ISÈRE

At the end of the Tarentaise Valley, Val d'Isère is the undisputed king of the region for good reason. There's buckets of skiing (300km!), off-piste, après-ski and non-skier offerings for everyone. We love it, but it's more luxury than budget, and there are hordes of Brits, so it's not for everyone.

FOR KIDS/BEGINNERS: There are two main (free) nursery areas and some good starter areas, with lots of variation for novices all over. The Village des Enfants (valdisere-levillagedesenfants.com) run with the ESF, takes children from 18 months. Older kids will love the snowparks, packed with halfpipes, rails and jumps with airbags.

Off the slopes, Val D'Isère is a wonderground for families, with nightly entertainment aplenty. There's archery, climbing, geo-caching, ice-skating, sledging and snow-shoeing. But Beach World pool (all water cannons and bubbling baths – one free visit with lift pass) won our family vote.

FOR PARENTS/OFF-PISTE SKIERS: The on and off-piste offerings are vast here. 'OK' and 'Orange' are legendary and 'La Face' gets the bragging rights. Or hire a guide and go pow! Grand Vallon, Pisteurs Couloirs or skiing Tovièr to Lac du Chevril are all classics. For poor light days, head to La Fornet for epic pillowy tree-skiing. valdisere.com

KING OF THE HILLS
Val d'Isère offers more than 300km of skiing



SKI SAFE

With off-piste skiing comes accelerated safety risk. Always book a guide, take full avalanche safety precautions and get insurance.



THE LOWDOWN

WHERE TO STAY

Crystal Ski (crystalski.co.uk; 020 8939 0726) offers a week's self-catering at the four-star Les Balcons Apartments from £465pp; a week's self-catering at the four-star Les Fermes de Sainte Foy Apartments in Sainte Foy from £515pp; a week's half-board at the three-star Hotel Auberge St Hubert in Val d'Isère from £708pp. All including flights and transfers.

For childcare, try: snowlittle.co.uk or valdinet.com/childcare

HOW TO GET THERE

Monarch flies from Gatwick and Manchester to Geneva up to two times a week during winter from £33 one-way. monarch.co.uk Transfer from Geneva: 2hr30

LA ROSIÈRE 1850

La Rosière is an unpretentious, little-known gem with plenty for everyone. It's a small, friendly traditional French resort that caters brilliantly to young families. It's also high (1,850m), and linked to the Italy's La Thuile, with 160km ski area and world-class off-piste.

FOR KIDS/BEGINNERS:

With lots of gentle, south-facing (so, sun-soaked) blues and greens, this is a good confidence-builder resort. The ski school is highly regarded. The bigger ones can head for the snowpark, boarder cross and snow-kiting area. The crèches are excellent, too. Le Club des Galopins (esflarosiere.com/ski-school; larosiere.co.uk, 18 months+) offers a mix of indoor and outdoor snow play for kids and is good value (£22 half day, £111 weekly). Meanwhile, little ones adore the Espace San Bernado, a dog-themed off-piste introduction trail, zooming down ducking through kennels and hitting dog bones to sound wind chimes.

FOR GOOD/OFF-PISTE SKIERS: There are some great reds and blacks here but the hands-down highlight is skiing over to Italy for lunch. (Book Ristorante Lo Tata for seriously good pizza - it's cheap and no need for a passport!) Meanwhile, the extensive powder offerings here are insane. Book a guide and head to Montvalezon or play in Les Ecludets' trees. Budget no issue? Experts can heliski (La Rosière heliski)! winter.larosiere.net

GENTLE SLOPES

Sainte Foy is great for beginners, with lots of wide, easy runs and a separate learning area



SAINTE FOY

After a quaint, quiet resort with good family offerings and acres of off-piste? Sainte Foy

('fwah', 1,550m) is an oft-overlooked ideal choice for beginners and experts. It's small and there's no snowpark, but adventurous families can explore off-piste, plus it's a 10-30-minute drive to Val D'Isère, Tignes, Les Arcs and La Rosière.

FOR KIDS/BEGINNERS: It's perfect for novices, with wide, sweeping runs and a separate learning area. The nursery slopes (free) have two magic carpets. P'tits Trappeurs looks after children 3-11 (9am-4.45pm, £22 half-day, £40 full day). All pistes are groomed nightly, so no monstrous icy moguls here. For après-ski, there are tons of offerings: sledging, snowman-building contests, torchlit descents, fireworks. It's worth noting the slopes all lead back to the village, so hard to lose the kids!

FOR GOOD/OFF-PISTE SKIERS: On-piste is limited but there are some challenging runs with corduroy slopes good for improving carving technique, and the off-piste is immense (800 hectares). We skied with Colin Waeckel (colin.waeckel@gmail.com/ +33 (0)646801113), who we highly recommend. Book through Evolution 2 (evolution2.com). saintefoy-tarentaise.com