



LET IT SNOW



PHOTOGRAPHS:
PHILIP VILE AND TOM
LAKEMAN

Ski aficionados are slaloming away from the glitz and glamour of buzzy mountain resorts towards quieter, more refined styles of Alpine lodging, observes **Leo Bear**

Jetsetters flocking to the Alps for sunshine, Champagne air – so fresh it gives you a high – and après-ski shoulder-rubbing, are always seeking to upgrade on last season’s slopeside digs. And it’s not hard. From elegant palace hotels to flashy high-altitude havens with ski-in piazzas and sunken spas, new establishments eclipse last season’s like designer runway looks. But this year, the snow is shifting, and Moncler-clad ski bunnies are turning down haute-couture hotels in favour of more authentic, rustic-luxe mountain retreats.

Traditional chalets designed with a quieter visitor in mind are taking more bookings than ever, according to Andy Stuart, owner of chalet company VIP SKI: ‘We’ve noticed a steep rise in demand for our more remote “off the radar” chalets that sit at altitude on the piste – Chalet Poudreuse at 1,850m in Avoriaz, for example – and we think that it’s because as skiers become older, more experienced and more discerning, they seek tranquillity as much as they seek guaranteed snow.’

Peacefulness is certainly what attracts in-the-know visitors to the hilltop hamlet of Commeire near Verbier. Here lies the Montagne Alternative, a collection of barns so lovingly restored, you’d never know they were part of a hotel. Haybarn exteriors blend with retro-styled interiors and floor-to-ceiling picture windows to heart-lifting effect, and in place of snow butlers and pseudo-Swiss design, the ethos behind the establishment is one of long-term sustainability. On top of stylish interiors featuring retro slingback chairs and Brazilian hand-knotted rugs, there’s yoga, Afghan walking and private dinners in the town’s original carnotzet (wine cellar) to enjoy. Eduardo Ramos, director of operations at the Montagne Alternative, explains: ‘What we offer goes way beyond shuttling guests to and from the slopes. People come here to connect with the essence of the

mountain, far away from noise, crowds and technology. We give our guests space, nature and silence.’

The trend for authentic rustic-luxe is also gaining pace in some of Europe’s hippest new ski hotels. Both The Chedi in Andermatt and the irrefutably cool Alpina Gstaad in Switzerland are tempering contemporary aesthetics with reclaimed wooden beams, log fires in guest rooms and side tables fashioned from antique walking sticks. However, for genuine Alpine authenticity, one has to look a little harder; dig a bit deeper into the avalanche of luxury hotel and chalet offerings. Enter, the perfectly petite ski resort of Les Gets in France.

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Just 50 minutes from Geneva, Les Gets feels a world away from the Champagne-swilling seasonaires, and is one of the least damaged resorts in the Haute-Savoie. Unaffected by mass tourism, it sits at the base of the Alps like a child’s frosted snowglobe. Much of its charm ➔



→ can be attributed to a tight-knit community consisting mainly of four families and the surrounding area's thriving farming business. Add to this stringent eco-regulations protecting the pine valleys enclosing the village (off-piste ski-ing is frowned upon should you accidentally behold a rare form of flora), and the net result is extra-long ski runs, and air so clean you can almost feel yourself getting younger with each day you stay. Situated on the Swiss-French border with access to Morzine and Avoriaz, there's powder by the truckload at Le Chamossière and wide-open pistes perfect for beginners at Ranfolly, all of which is crowned by ravishing views of Mont Blanc. Non-skiers needn't miss out either. They can pull on their fur-lined boots and crunch along 5km trails, weaving patterns in the Mont Chéry and Chavannes slopes – walking for hours without encountering another soul – then meet friends for lunch before riding a gondola back to ground level.

In town, the bright lights of Louis Vuitton, Chanel and Chopard are absent. Streets are lined with traditional Savoyarde architecture and many of the homes are still heated the old-fashioned way: by wood burner. Back in the 1970s, a rally cry dictated that 'the highest building in the village must be the church steeple', and this motto still serves it well. Said church steeple is visible from most of Les Gets' low-lying landmarks, including a number of charming family-run chalets. But from the yawning picture windows of Les Gets' most luxurious chalet Ferme de Moudon, you won't be able to see it. Nor will you be able to see the resort's ski gondolas gently drifting up and down the mountain, or the usual higgledy-piggledy clutter of hardwood rooftops and jaunty fairy-lit bars. The view from Ferme de Moudon is one of pure, undiluted alpine privilege: a blanketed snowy valley steeply encased by forests of pine trees. From the chalet's wraparound terrace, where sheepskin-covered wooden rockers beg to be reclined in, all you can hear is rushing water



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from the brook below – pure Narnia.

Located at the end of a quiet lane, a mile outside town, with little in the way of signposting, this 18th-century farmhouse is large enough to sleep ten in glorious isolation. Combining locally sourced timber, stone and glass with 21st-century good looks, renowned British interior designer Nicky Dobree hit the nail on the head when she built it ten years ago with the help of Norwegian architect Henriette Salvesen. From the outside, it's a traditional piece of alpine vernacular, but inside, gleaming surfaces collide with chunky ancient beams for a decadent rough-luxe feel. Dobree's ability to blend modern clean lines with deep solidarity is what sets Ferme de Moudon apart from other ski chalets, and the benefits of having an interiors expert at the helm are plain for all to see: warmth, texture and personality in spades.

Catering to guests' every whim, there is a staff of five including a professional chef who is well-versed in the art of crisping the surface of a

crème brûlée, and a housekeeping team who provide a better turndown service than most five-star hotels. Everything has been thought of, from heated boot racks to the basket of Twix by the back door should you need a sugar fix on a static chairlift. Even suntan lotion is provided.

Alongside unparalleled local knowledge, the team here bring dry wit and impeccable manners to the table, and possess all the contacts necessary to whisk you to the best snow, whether it be by 4x4 or helicopter. And it's for this reason that we crown Ferme de Moudon this season's best chalet in the Alps. Actress Emma Thompson was certainly impressed – you should see the gushing scrawl she left in the guestbook. ☑

THE ESSENTIALS

Winter rates at Ferme de Moudon in Les Gets, France, start from £19,937 per week. For more information call 020 7627 0469, email sales@fermedemoudon.com or visit fermedemoudon.com