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Feature Samoëns – The Small French Village With Big Resort Skiing

BY MEGAN HUGHES 20th December 2019



The Long Road from Hills to Mountains
BY ROBERT THORNE

It's often thought that a ski resort can't have the best of both worlds. How often do you see quaint mountain resorts, all cobbled streets and wooden chalets, unspoilt by large apartment blocks, mass tourism or without a lengthy journey to the nearest ski area? Not often! So when we first visited the French resort of Samoëns, we could hardly believe that we had actually found an area that seemed to have the best of both!

A gorgeous traditional village with access to the huge ski area of the Grand Massif, Samoëns might just be the ultimate best-of-both ski resort. And, just 75 minutes from Geneva airport, Samoëns makes an ideal destination for families or groups looking for a quick, hassle-free transfer.

An Enchanting Village

Samoëns is the quintessential authentic mountain village. Its quaint, cobbled streets, filled with charming boutiques and cafés, seems drawn straight out of a postcard, with the mountains looming gloriously overhead. In fact, Samoëns and the name of its inhabitants derives from a medieval expression describing "the seven mountains", a reference to the peaks around this old farming village.



It's a destination that oozes atmosphere – that cosy, relaxed Alpine feel which, in our experience, can only be found in a handful of ski resorts. Where new builds do exist here, they tend to be timber chalets, designed in keeping with their surroundings.

Perhaps this is due to its history as a winter haven. The beautiful traditional market square is home to covered market halls, open at all sides, which were built back in the 14th Century. Now, this square remains a central feature of the village, hosting events throughout the year. Part of the square contains a historic church dating from the 13th Century, offering visitors a unique glimpse into the town's past.

From the centre of Samoëns, a modern gondola provides a direct connection to a fantastic ski area, truly cementing Samoëns as a destination that offers the best of both worlds – small town charm and big mountain skiing.



The Ski Area

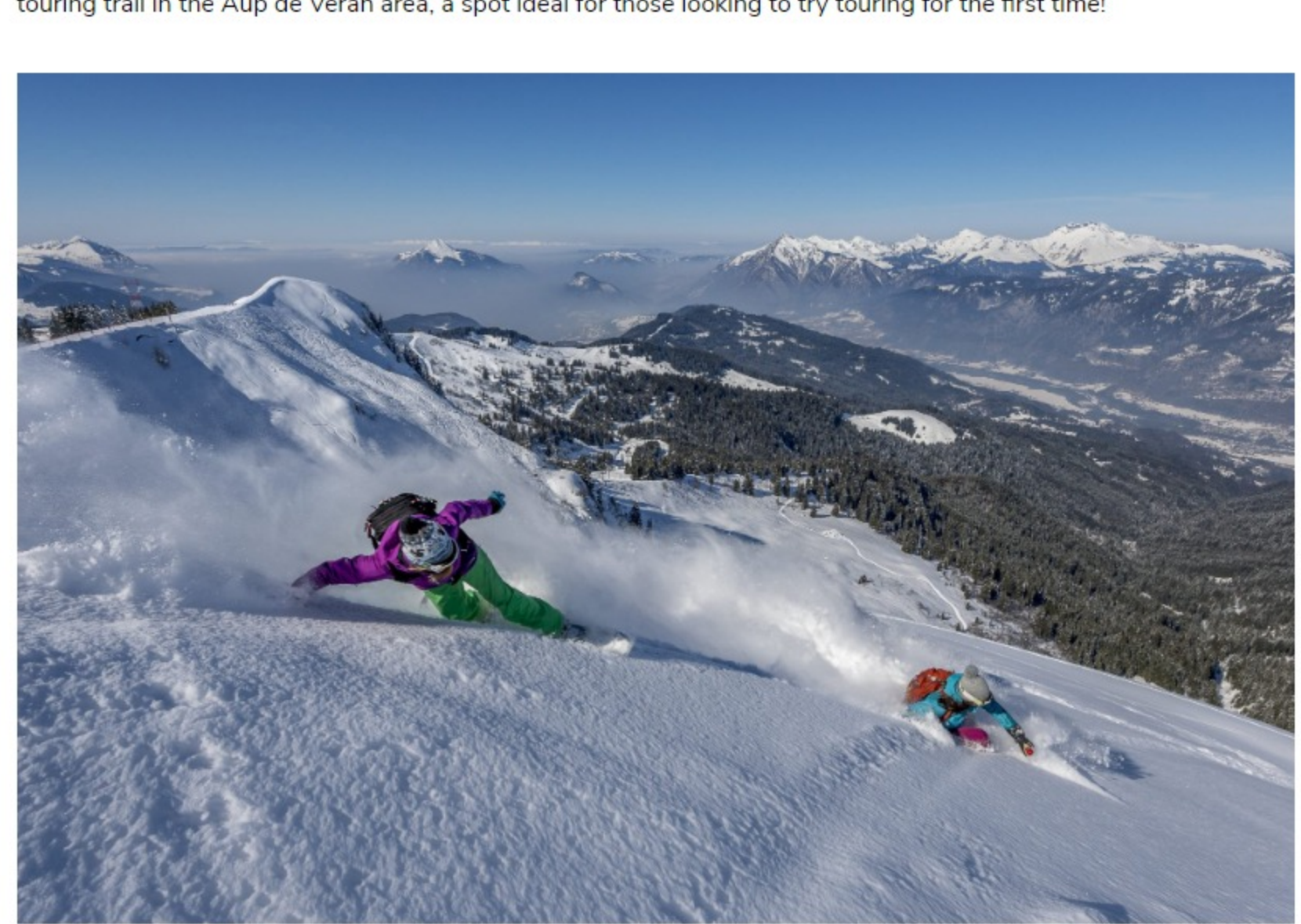
Samoëns provides skiers with a gateway into one of the largest ski areas in France (the fourth largest, to be precise!). The Grand Massif encompasses Les Carroz, Morillon, Flaine and Sixt, as well as Samoëns. The area boasts a pretty impressive snow record thanks to its close proximity to Mont Blanc, as well as 265km of runs. 142 slopes (23 green, 60 blue, 47 red, 12 black), offer a huge choice for all, from first-timers to seasoned skiers.

The impressive number of green and blue runs is a particular draw here for many skiers. In some larger ski areas, it's not uncommon for many beginner and intermediate skiers to converge on the same few blue slopes, as there may not be a huge variety of options close enough to the resort. Not in Samoëns! Here, over 80 blue and green runs mean that those who are less confident have a huge amount of choice on the mountain, and as a result, runs are often delightfully empty and significantly less stressful!

For those just starting out on their skis, 'Ze Septisnake' is the perfect spot in which to find your feet, with a lovely gentle green track and a 120 metre magic carpet, ideal for those who may be intimidated by ski lifts at first! For younger learners, the ZiziPanPan forest fun area is a tried and tested favourite, a magically themed area with a small zipline to that offers the perfect combination of adventure and skiing!

One of our favourite runs, Les Cascades, is a great choice for those looking to practice their turns on a longer blue route. 14km in length, it's not only a lovely run for beginner to intermediate skiers to progress their skiing, but for skiers of all abilities to simply enjoy the gentle descent and get away from it all, amidst some of the most spectacular mountain scenery.

For more advanced skiers, the varied black routes and endless opportunities for epic off piste adventures (thanks to the area's reliable snowfall) make this a fantastic destination for a week's skiing. You can even try the new ski touring trail in the Aup de Veran area, a spot ideal for those looking to try touring for the first time!



Off The Slopes

If you want to enjoy the snow in a different way, Samoëns also offers 15 snow shoe trails, which allow visitors to experience the still magic of the mountains away from the adrenaline of the slopes. One guided snowshoe walk is aimed specifically at families, with the opportunity to learn about the mountains you are in the midst of – from the science of the snow, to the geology of the landscape.

Another option allows you to enjoy snowshoeing at night, hiking up into the mountains at dusk, with the chance to enjoy some delicious Savoyard specialties in a real igloo before heading back down to the town.

For more adventurous visitors, Fat Biking or Yoener sledging are incredibly fun activities sure to put a smile on your face as you discover a new mountain thrill.

E-Fat Bikes are electric-powered mountain bikes with over-sized tyres, which offer great grip and comfort on the snow. Take an electric Fat Bike trip with an instructor along the banks of the Giffre, or for a more active trip, climb to 1100m, to a charming Alpine refuge, before fat biking back down the slopes home!

Yoener sledging on the other hand, requires solely heading downhill, on an easy-to-use sledge that guarantees a fun ride.

In Samoëns, après-ski more often involves a relaxed glass of wine by a crackling fire than a raucous party, but there are plenty of free activities organised by the tourist office throughout the winter, including Friday evening entertainment and treasure hunts around the village, so you're sure to always find something to suit you once the slopes are closed.

Or, to fully unwind after a long day of joy, a range of wellness activities are available in Samoëns, from relaxing spas and massage options, to Nordic walks and yoga practices.



Where to Stay

In a relaxed resort such as Samoëns, you want an accommodation to match. Somewhere where you know you will experience impeccable service and be well looked after, with top facilities and varied accommodation choices. Peak Retreats features a selection of apartments, self-catered chalets and hotels in Samoëns. French Alps specialists, they know everything there is to know about the best resorts in the Alps.

From modern self-catered apartments, to luxurious hotels and stunning self-catered chalets, Peak Retreats are sure to help you find your perfect Samoëns stay.

Peak Retreats, the award-winning French Alps specialist features traditional resorts with access to brilliant skiing, exactly like Samoëns. The team has a wealth of experience to share and is passionate about finding clients their perfect ski holiday.

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