MARK WARNER
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06 Jan 25

Pre-Christmas skiing had been something of yesteryear for us. For the last few years, we had tended to opt for New Year's, but this year was different. Instead, we fantasised as a family about the crisp, snowy feel of being in a resort during the run-up to Santa's arrival — skiing and soaking up the freedom of the mountains, surrounded by like-minded skiers, away from work, school exams, and revision.

After poring over multiple destinations, we opted for **Alpe d'Huez**, nestled in the heart of the French Alps, with its reputation as *L'Île au Soleil* ("The Island of the Sun"). It seemed to offer the full package: superb, widespread skiing, a picturesque village, and plenty of places to eat out under sun-drenched skies. The decision was made.

We set off within an hour of the children finishing school, aiming to reach Reims, France, on Friday night before our final drive up to the resort the following day. This would ensure we arrived in time for dinner on Saturday.

We drove because we like the flexibility of limitless luggage, not to mention the 70% saving on flights and transfers. Booking ***Le Tunnel*** in advance meant we secured return tickets for around £250 — incredible value at just over £60 per person.

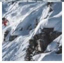
On Saturday, the French countryside sped by on the open motorway network, soon giving way to the towering peaks of the Alps. The excitement of seeing the first snowy peaks was awe-inspiring, and this feeling was only heightened by Christmas being just a week away.

alpe*huez
3330 m

The real adventure began as we approached the **legendary 21 hairpin bends** leading up to Alpe d'Huez. Each twist and turn felt like being wound upward into a slice of heaven, as the early snow-dusted roads gradually transformed into more heavily carpeted snowbanks, teasing what lay ahead.

By the time we reached the top, the sun had set, and the car thermometer read -7°C. Stepping out, we were greeted by the crunch of freshly fallen snow underfoot and twinkling Christmas lights, creating that magical feeling. This wasn't going to be just any ski holiday.

Watch the Video Review – can you Ski in Alpe d'Huez before Christmas?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WHAT'S ALPE D'HUEZ REALLY LIKE?

First Impressions

As we pulled up outside ***Le Cristal de l'Alpe***, the hotel apartments gave off a warm glow of lights, inviting us in. It's always an exciting part of the trip—finding out what the accommodation is actually like compared to the website! We unloaded what felt like everything except the kitchen sink. Luckily, the apartment was spacious, modern, and luxurious—complete with a welcoming warmth that was much needed.

Le Cristal de l'Alpe

The kids paced around, choosing bedrooms and bathrooms for the week ahead, and within minutes, it looked like we had lived there for years. The mini Christmas tree was up, the advent calendar was hanging, and clothes were sprawled across every bed and floor space of the apartment—ah, the joys of having two daughters. With darkness cloaking the landscape, we could only guess at the views awaiting us the next day outside the huge picture-frame glass balcony doors.

We quickly realised how hungry we all were, so we set out to explore the Christmassy village and find our first chosen meal of the week. We happened upon ***Le Chalet du Per'Sillé***. It looked rather unassuming from the outside, tucked away and nestled in deep snow, but the warm, cosy atmosphere and the welcoming greeting from the lovely staff, who took pity on the fact that we didn't have a reservation, meant that 15 minutes later, we were ordering four flaming steaks.

A Morning Revelation

Waking up the next morning and pulling back the curtains revealed a panoramic view of the snow-blanketed resort, all illuminated by golden sunlight that rushed us out of bed far earlier than we anticipated. Day 1 of skiing for the 2024/25 season beckoned.

Skiing Sarenne

Our first day on the slopes was superb. Cruising around the sweeping, wide red and blue runs warmed our legs up as we explored the vast terrain, while we eyed up the **legendary Sarenne run** for our Day 2 adventure—**the longest black run in Europe at 16km.**

Conditions were excellent: plenty of snow and quiet slopes meant no lift queues, no rushing to take lunches at inconvenient times. Instead, we were able to take in laps of lifts and runs punctuated by hot chocolates and vin chaud—all under a fabulous canopy of clear blue skies and sunshine, just as promised by its name.

Each day, we began to build up our own itinerary: early reds to warm up, then aiming higher and higher up toward Pic Blanc as the days progressed.

alpe d'huez
PIC BLANC 3330 m

The iconic Sarenne run lived up to its promise—exhausting for the shorter legs of the crew, but ultimately a hugely rewarding descent, 16km from 3300m down to the Sarenne Gorge and, finally, the resort base. We ended up taking lunch at ***Chante Bise,*** a slopeside eatery with a beautiful terrace offering everything from hot dogs to lasagna and raclette. The smell of melting cheese and the chatter of fellow skiers added to the outdoor dining atmosphere. It was the kind of meal that makes you want to linger longer, knowing the slopes will wait for you. We moved inside to the glazed area of the restaurant as the sun warmed us like seedlings in a greenhouse. We soaked up some final warmth with coffees and hot chocolates before heading back out to ski some more.

alpe*hue
3330

Each day of skiing seemed better and more exciting than the last, with the children venturing off for the odd lap on their own as we watched nervously from chosen eateries like ***Le Cabane*** and *La Fruitière* at ***La Folie Douce***. One of our favoured feeding spots was Signal 2108, unsurprisingly at the top of the Le Signal lift. Overlooking the entire resort of Alpe d'Huez, it offered the perfect vista and some rather unclassic, yet fabulous, on-mountain food—pad Thai and curry. This unconventional mountain food was absolutely delicious.

Après-Ski and Village Charm

Evenings in Alpe d'Huez were just as magical. After long days on the slopes, we explored its streets, twinkling with fairy lights and Christmas trees, passing bars and restaurants filled with noisy hubbub and smells pouring out of each doorway.

The village had a quiet, buzzy vibe, rather than a "dancing on tables" après-ski feel, but of course, *La Folie Douce*, slopeside at the top of the Marmotte One lift, can easily satisfy the snake-hips among us. **The *Moose Bar***, with its chalet-style facade, and the pumping music and fairy lights outside, as well as *Underground* and *Smithy's Tavern* (if you need late-night party watering holes), also offered plenty of après-ski options.

LAFOLIEDOUCE

As a family, we meandered around the countless shops, eateries, and sports outlets, pouring over the latest ski gear. New matchy-matchy poles, a helmet, and yet another pair of gloves seemed to be the necessary pre-Santa purchases.

Edelweiss Restaurant

We particularly enjoyed dining at ***Edelweiss***, a few minutes outside of the resort centre. This beautiful, modern wooden chalet on the street was buzzing with a warm atmosphere. Their jam-packed tables and superb waiting staff tended hot stone meats—where you cook your selection of meats on a heated stone at your table—and raclette, which provided not just a meal but an interactive dining experience. We seemed to make friends with people from every nationality around us.

Non-Skiing Activities

Beyond skiing and dining, Alpe d'Huez offered a vibrant village atmosphere with activities for everyone. The ice rink gave great entertainment for people of all ages, supporting the local ice hockey team. For a moment, we felt like we were in a Canadian resort as people cheered on the game and danced to the music during the intervals. There is also a large public pool, but we were lucky enough to have our own back at the hotel, as well as all the usual non-ski activities like dog sledding and snowshoeing that you come to expect from a resort of this caliber. A ride on the ***Alpe Express* lift** to Villard-Reculas offers stunning panoramic views, even for those not skiing. For adrenaline junkies, paragliding over the slopes provides an unforgettable perspective of the mountains, although it wasn't something I managed to fit in this time.

The town itself is dotted with charming shops, inviting cafes, and a variety of restaurants, making it a delightful place to explore. There are also wellness facilities, including spas and massage centres, perfect for relaxation after a day of skiing.

A Perfect Start to the Season

Alpe d'Huez ultimately delivered on every level. The snow conditions were superb, with fresh powder and well-groomed pistes. The town and slopes were blissfully uncrowded, allowing us to fully relax and soak up the magic of the mountains. The restaurants in the resort and on the mountain were great for every member of the family, and the overall resort atmosphere satisfied the whole family.

The serene and festive spirit, with fairy lights twinkling in the village and the crisp mountain air, made pre-Christmas skiing without a doubt back on the agenda for us. For anyone looking to kickstart their ski season, Alpe d'Huez before Christmas felt like the perfect choice. With varied terrain, great food, a buzzing après-ski scene, and plenty of accommodation options, it absolutely delivered.

Getting There

We drove to Alpe d'Huez with Eurotunnel. With a swift crossing and room for all your gear, it's ideal for any skier or family. Book your Eurotunnel ticket with Peak Retreats as part of your overall holiday package and enjoy a seamless, Eurotunnel-inclusive holiday.

Alpe d'huez, France

14-21 December 24

Eurotunnel

Peak Retreats, Le Cristal de l'Alpe

Key Information – Le Cristal de l'Alpe

Our base for the trip was the stunning **Le Cristal de l'Alpe**, booked through **Peak Retreats**. Ideally situated within walking distance of shops, bars, and restaurants, this residence offered the perfect blend of convenience and comfort. The spacious, modern apartments provided a stylish and cosy retreat, complete with excellent facilities and seamless ski access just 200m from the pistes and 50m from the nearest lift, it made every part of our stay stress-free. After exhilarating days on the slopes, the wellness area—with its soothing sauna and inviting hot tub—was a luxurious haven to unwind and recharge. Le Cristal de l'Alpe truly elevated our mountain getaway.

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