The perfect ski holiday in Sainte Foy, the small but perfectly-formed French resort

Where to stay, eat, drink and ski in this family-friendly French gem

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Quiet and compact, Sainte Foy still retains the feel of being an insider secret Credit: David André

Families, particularly British families, love this tiny ski resort in the Tarentaise valley – and with good reason. It's quiet, compact and low-rise, and while far from undiscovered, it still has the air of being an insider secret.

Opened in 1990, at an altitude of 1,550m, Sainte Foy (officially known as Sainte Foy Tarentaise Station) is the youngest purpose-built resort in France and offers a straggle of chalet and apartment accommodation clustered around a couple of pedestrianised retail areas. While it lacks a single, defined centre, the architects have created a resort that is harmonious and easy to navigate, with the focus on the action taking place on the "front de neige". It's scenic too, with lifts rising to an altitude of 2,620m beneath the summit of La Grande Sassière (3,746m), and offers great terrain not only for beginners and improvers, but also for experts.

Sainte Foy is the youngest purpose-built resort in France Credit: Wirestock/Getty

At first glance it seems clear that anyone looking for more challenge might find the resort's 43km ski area far too limiting for a week's holiday. However, experts can access some top-notch touring and off-piste areas. And Sainte Foy's proximity to some of France's best-known and snow-sure heavyweights is a further feather in its cap. Both Val d'Isère and Tignes, offering a combined ski area of 300km, lie within a short drive.

Stay on track with the essential facts from the resort below, and scroll down for our insider guide to a day on the pistes, expert ratings and advice. For further Sainte Foy inspiration, see our guides to the resort's restaurants and après ski.

In this guide:

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- Essential information

Fast facts | Sainte Foy, France

Resort height	1,550m
Total ski area size	43km
Slope height	1,550-2,620m
Number of lifts	6
Lift pass price *	€240 (incl. complimentary seventh day)
Nearest airport	Chambéry (135km), 100 minutes; Geneva (165km), 170 minutes; Grenoble (200km), 160 minutes
Nearest station	Bourg-St-Maurice (19km), 30 minutes. Regular buses run from the station

* six-day lift pass price for 2024/25

Inside the resort

Inaugurated in December 1990, this compact resort is built in sympathetic wood-and-stone Savoyard style, with the architects taking their inspiration from the centuries-old surrounding hamlets.

The ski resort of Sainte Foy Tarentaise Station is four miles from the parish's main town (rather confusingly also called Sainte Foy Tarentaise). The little hamlets scattered around the area – including La Mazure, Le Miroir, Vicilaire and Le Tourney – and the main town are linked to the resort hub by a regular shuttle bus.

Discrete developments of low-rise chalets, many ski-in/ski-out, line the hillsides to the east and west of Sainte Foy Station. To the west are the areas of La Batailletaz, La Chapelle and Les Balcons de Sainte Foy and to the east are Les Maisonettes and Bonconseil Dessus.

The centre is pedestrianised with car parks tucked well away from the main centre and the snow front, creating a quiet, relaxing vibe.

Sainte Foy is a charming, Savoyard style resort in miniature

Essentially this is a resort in miniature and all the development is on a pleasantly small scale. Beyond one or two fancier delis, facilities are limited to essentials: a few equipment hire shops, plus a handful of bars and family-run restaurants. There are also a couple of mini supermarkets – one in Place des Charmettes on the Bonconseil side of the resort and another larger one in Place de la Chapelle. The former also has a bakery, but all the outlets are within easy walking distance and nowhere is too far away from the main Grand Plan lift, the ski school meeting point or the two beginners' areas centred around the Marmottes and Galopins magic carpet lifts.

While there are options for a convivial drink at the end of the day, anyone looking for full-on après ski will be disappointed. Nightlife is almost non-existent beyond occasional live music or karaoke nights.

Predominantly, therefore, it best suits families looking for self-catered or catered stays within easy distance of the slopes – it's no problem to pop back to your accommodation for lunch here. Or for couples or groups of friends looking for comfortable accommodation, good value and tranquillity.

Our ratings

Beginners 4/5
Intermediates 2/5
Experts 4/5
Snowboarders 3/5
Terrain parks 2/5
Extent 2/5

Snow reliability 3/5
Off piste 4/5
Village charm 3/5
Families 4/5
Budget 2/5
Luxury 3/5

Après 2/5
Off slope facilities 2/5
Shops 1/5
Food 2/5
Scenery 4/5

On the slopes

Sainte Foy has just six lifts – and two of these are magic carpets serving the nursery slopes of Marmots and Galopins (the latter also has a toboggan run) – combined with 43km of pistes. Its north-west-facing slopes help to ensure good snow conditions through the season and a big plus point for nervous navigators – as well as for parents of independently-minded teenagers – is the reassurance that all runs lead back to the resort centre.

The main Grand Plan lift carries skiers and pedestrians to the top of Plan Bois where a couple of blue pistes, Les Charmettes and Plan Bois, wind gently back to the resort providing ideal confidence-building runs for improvers.

More experienced skiers can head up to Col de l'Aiguille (2,622m) to enjoy fabulous views of the Rocher de Pierre d'Arbine and the neighbouring valley, before heading down on the open red runs, L'Aiguille and Creux de Formeïan. These link up with Plan Bois for a long and looping trail through the trees making an enjoyably varied and lengthy descent.

Sainte Foy, despite its small scale, provides excellent confidence-boosting runs for beginners and improvers Credit: David André

Alternatively, you can head towards La Marquise along Plan des Beaux – a good area for sunshine early in the day if the rest of the resort is in shadow. Here, you'll also find yourself on a broad, open run where you join Grand Solliet and can stick to the blue for a cruisy highway under the La Marquise lift before descending through trees. There's also the option to take the slightly more challenging and shorter red, Foglietta, which rollercoasters downwards to meet the Grand Solliet at a lower altitude.

Once over this side of the resort, there's scope for having some fun on the linked reds and blues (perhaps with a stop for a warming drink on the terraces of La Marquise) before taking the zig-zaggy Le Toboggan run, past the snowpark and boardercross area, to the long blue La Chapelle piste, a fun-run designed for children with cut-outs, chime bars and pictures of the resort's cartoon mascots, Nutsy and Foxy.

Black runs are limited. Just a couple of unpisted stretches, which are accessed from the top of L'Aiguille – turn left for the black Natur' Morion, which links to the shorter Natur' Shapper's Paradise, or right for the Natur' Crystal Dark. These offer some interesting moguls, but it's really the off-piste that is the main draw for expert skiers and snowboarders who want a more challenging time.

Experienced skiers can look forward to Sainte Foy's excellent off-piste terrain Credit: Philippe Royer/Gamma-Rapho

The slopes accessed from the top of the La Marquise lift are popular with snowboarders, but they are reached by an arduous climb on foot. For those who want to get off the beaten track, Sainte Foy is an ideal resort for guide-led ski touring, bookable through the ski schools and tourist office.

Who should go?

While the slopes in Sainte Foy provide something for everyone, it's a tiny area and best suited to beginners and improvers or experts who can access some excellent off-piste terrain. Intermediates and advanced intermediates are less well catered for and may start to crave new runs after two or three days. However, Sainte Foy is the perfect springboard to the neighbouring ski resorts of Tignes, Val d'Isère, Les Arcs or La Rosière where you can buy discounted day-rate passes on production of a six-day Sainte Foy pass. Families are well catered for and lifts are free for children aged under eight years.

Where to stay

Most skiers choose to stay in the purpose-built resort of Sainte Foy Station, designed to resemble a traditional mountain village with apartments and chalets clustered around a pedestrian centre and with easy access to the lifts. However, the many surrounding hamlets, including Le Monal and Le Mirror, are linked to the resort by bus and offer a more authentically Alpine atmosphere.

CHALET
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Sainte Foy was purposely-designed to resemble a traditional Alpine mountain village Credit: David André

How to get there

While too small to interest most of the mainstream UK ski operators, Crystal Ski (crystalski.co.uk) features a couple of family-friendly self-catering residences in Sainte Foy Station, both ski-in/ski-out, and with indoor pools and spa facilities. Self-drive specialist Peak Retreats (peakretreats.co.uk) also offers self-catering packages which include Eurotunnel LeShuttle crossings. The main chalet specialist, Première Neige (premiere-neige.com), offers over 20 self-catered and catered chalets. The Sainte Foy Chalet Company (thesaintefoychaletcompany.com) offers a range of chalets and apartments, with a Saturday or Sunday changeover. Both chalet operators can arrange airport transfers for guests.

Altibus (altibus.com) provides transfers from Bourg-Saint-Maurice rail station. Airport transfers to Bourg-Saint-Maurice are available with Ben's Bus (bensbus.co.uk). Snowexpress (snowexpress.co.uk) offers weekly, overnight travel to the resort from London Victoria and Folkestone.

When to go

2024 opening date: December 14 2024
2025 closing date: April 21 2025

In December and January the main slopes are largely plunged into shadow by the vast outcrop of Rocher de Pierre d'Arbine, which blocks the sunlight until mid-morning, making for good snow but chilly conditions. Fair weather skiers who like starting early are better off visiting in February or March, when the sun is higher. This calm and quiet resort is best suited to families with young children or groups of adults looking for a relaxed chalet stay. The weekly entertainment programme is low-key, convivial and mostly aimed at families.

Sainte Foy's north-west-facing slopes help to ensure good snow conditions through the season Credit: David André

Know before you go

Essential information

- British Embassy/Consulate: (0033 144 513100; ukinfrance.fco.gov.uk)
- Ambulance (samu): dial 15
- Police: dial 17
- Fire (pompiers): dial 18
- Emergency services from mobile phone: dial 112
- Tourist office: See sainte-foy-tarantaise.com, the website for the Sainte Foy Tourist Board, for weather reports, lift status, webcams, traffic details and local event listings. Pick up maps, leaflets and other information from the office on Route de Guersaz, La Bataillette Station.

The basics

- Currency: Euro
- Telephone code: dial 0033, then leave off the zero at the start of the number
- Time difference: +1 hour

Local laws and etiquette

- When greeting people, formal titles (Monsieur, Madame and Mademoiselle) are used much more in French than in English.
- The laws of vouvoiement (which version of "you" to use) take years to master. If in doubt – except when talking to children or animals – always use the formal vous form (second person plural) rather than the more casual tu.
- When driving, it's compulsory to keep fluorescent bibs and a hazard triangle in the car in case of breakdown. It's also compulsory to have snow chains in your car or winter tyres from the beginning of November until March.

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Last updated: January 30, 2025. Change in upper and lower snow depth is weekly, published by resorts. Powder rating is based on change in upper snow depth. Terrain open estimated from latest resort statistics.

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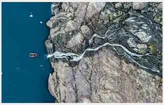

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