



Cool | runnings

Amie Keeley joins an agent learn-to-ski fam to Tignes with Inghams

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Having always shunned snowy holidays in favour of ones that feature beaches, blue skies and general lethargy, the idea of learning to ski filled me with only mild enthusiasm.

One week and a few falls later, I'm now a fully converted skiing enthusiast and have recently booked my next trip to the slopes.

I joined a group of 20 agents for one of the learn-to-ski trips hosted by Inghams in Tignes, France. The operator is hoping to increase its new-to-ski customers and with real earnings up and a recent drop of snow in the Alps, all the right ingredients are there to encourage more clients to head to the mountains.

But selling any type of holiday you have no knowledge of or experience in is daunting and this is especially the case for ski.

"Ski can be perceived as a complex holiday, but once you break down and understand the integral parts – like what customers do on their first day and what else is available in resorts for those who don't ski – you will start to become more confident about what you are selling," says Inghams group head of sales, Simon McIntyre.

The central aim of this trip was to take agents through each of these integral parts – from ski-fitting to experiencing chalet accommodation.

But for agents yet to experience it for themselves, McIntyre says: "Customers have high expectations so it's important they get sound recommendations for resorts and accommodation and that this part of the sales process is robust.

"We provide lots of training and constant support in the UK. We have staff in our reservations teams who have worked in our ski resorts on hand to help our agent partners, but the value of experiencing a ski resort first hand is priceless."

► LEARNING TO SKI

After many falls and finally getting to grips with the ski tunnel, by the end of the trip a fair few of us were comfortable snowploughing our



→ way down the blue run near our chalet.

This was in large part thanks to our instructor Christophe, who patiently guided us through the basics, from standing up after a fall – no mean feat – to balancing on one ski.

Lessons are essential if you are serious about skiing. Some will pick it up faster than others, but having seen the different shapes, sizes and ages taking to the slopes, anyone can do it if they're determined enough.

But it is highly advisable, if customers have never skied before, to get to a reasonable level of fitness beforehand. Just putting your gear on and moving feels like hard work when it's your first time.

▶ TIGNES

Located in the Savoie region of south eastern France in the Espace Killy Ski area, Tignes is a purpose-built resort that was the freestyle skiing venue for the 1992 Winter Olympics and co-host city for the 1992 Winter Paralympics. Three hours from Geneva airport, there are also good transport links from Chambéry, and Inghams guests can fly to one of these two gateways from 17 UK airports.



It's also Inghams' most popular ski destination. Described as a 'snow-sure' resort because of its high altitude, Tignes has one of the longest snow seasons in Europe, running from October to May. This makes it one of the most reliable resorts to sell, especially late in the season.

It might not be the number-one

choice for beginners, but with four nursery slopes, plenty of blue runs and free-of-charge practice lifts, it's still a good option, especially if you are in a group with varied abilities.

Being purpose-built in the 1950s, the architecture in the resort is a little drab, but it's also set on a beautiful mountain plateau, so the



Inghams' lead-in price for a new-to-skiing package in **Alpbach, Austria**, with five days of ski lessons of up to four hours a day, with ski or snowboard rental, starts at £145. Lift passes are payable locally.

In **Tignes**, a six-day local-area lift pass, six days' ski hire for beginners and three half-days of ski tuition starts at £315 for adults. agents.inghams.com

ABOVE: Agents on the fam trip
BELOW: Tignes





Chalet Hotel & Spa Le Savoie

→ panoramic backdrops outweigh any man-made ugliness.

▶ OTHER ACTIVITIES

Of course, skiing isn't for everyone – but that doesn't mean you can't enjoy a ski resort. Le Lagon swimming pool and wellness centre is situated in the middle of Tignes, complete with slides, spa baths, saunas and steam rooms.



Those after more adrenanline-inducing activities can hire a sledge and head down whichever slope they dare



For those after more adrenaline-inducing activities, you can hire a sledge and head down whichever slope you dare. Guides can take you down the steeper slopes after they close to general skiers.

In terms of après-ski, there's no shortage of low-key bars, cafes and restaurants. The atmosphere is relaxed and there's plenty of affordable and delicious, stodgy mountain food to fill you up after exhausting yourself on the slopes.

▶ ACCOMMODATION

Chalets represent the biggest proportion of Inghams' accommodation and offer good value for money. Meals, excluding lunch, are provided by the chalet host and are included in the overall price (see *Tried & Tested*).

Inghams also runs the Chalet Hotel Curling in Tignes. It's not the prettiest of buildings (1970s, brown) and it's probably seen better days inside, but it's located in the centre of Tignes-Val Claret and is two minutes' walk to the Tufts chairlift and ski school meeting point. It offers all the same meal elements of a chalet as well as a bar and is a good value option for smaller groups (rooms sleep two to four people).

At the other end of the market is Inghams' five-star Chalet Hotel & Spa Le Savoie in upmarket Val d'Isère. The flagship property is a luxury designer hotel with a pool and spa, in-house ski hire and a penthouse suite.



ASK THE AGENTS



Kerry Fifield, The Midcounties Co-operative:

"I feel more confident selling ski now after seeing the resort and going through 'ski fit' myself. It's helpful to know about things like the ski bus and the temperature so I can advise people what to pack."



Suzie Jones, The Destination Lounge:

"Getting to grips with the chalet concept has been really helpful and I'd recommend it. Even if you don't ski, there's plenty to do, with a pool, spa, shopping and cafes."



Marco Macchieraldo, Iglu:

"At work you go through the customer journey, but you never see the bit in the middle because you hand them over to the operator. So it's been interesting to experience the chalet and the skiing."

✓ Tried & Tested

CHALET CAMILLE, TIGNES

Talk of chalets conjures up images of snow-topped wooden cottages at the foot of a piste, a crackling log fire inside and, the ultimate indulgence, chalet staff to cook and clean for you.

Inghams' Chalet Camille offers exactly this, plus a few extras. Located just 30m from the piste, it sleeps 18 people (in nine en suite rooms) and has recently had a sauna and hot tub added – a huge plus to soothe muscles after a day's skiing.

Due to its size, this chalet is ideal for large groups or families, but can also be booked by the room, if you're happy to share with strangers.

The large open-plan lounge area is where everyone congregates for breakfast, dinner and afternoon tea, freshly prepared by the chalet staff. Burning off all those calories on the



slopes, food is a big deal when skiing, and the evening meals are exceptional – four courses of restaurant-standard food every evening including pre-dinner aperitifs and complimentary wines, which have recently been upgraded.

A free shuttle bus that wends its way around the resort runs every 10 minutes, and stops a few seconds' walk from the chalet.

A seven-night holiday starts at £679, including return flights from Gatwick to Geneva and transfers.