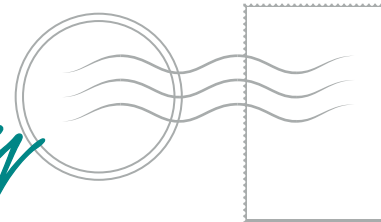


DESTINATIONS

FESTIVE BREAKS | ALPS

POSTCARD

Peisey-Vallandry



Hannah Meltzer takes a festive sleigh ride in an unexpected spot – high up in the French Alps

"Anywhere you can see white on the mountain, you can ski," says our sleigh driver, Yvon, looking out contentedly at the snow-enveloped mountains that surround us on every side. It's a perfect day of winter sun, with forget-me-not-blue skies and a burst of mountain sun making the blanket of white gleam and glitter.

I must have heard this phrase at least three times during my short but memorable stay in Peisey-Vallandry, a small but charming ski resort in the Savoie region of the French Alps, overlooking Mont Blanc. I'm a city person and not entirely in my element in the rural Alps, but I'd decided to leave my comfort zone behind and embark on an absolute beginner's ski trip.

Yvon the sleigh driver, on the other hand, is a man of the mountains – completely at home in the snow. While his horse gently pulls us around a little loop bordering the cross-country ski tracks, he tells us tales of his children, his horses and of the mountains. With his sun-kissed skin, felt trilby and relaxed air, he's the picture of a *montagnard*.

As we look out over the spruce and larch forests that blanket the mountains, it occurs to me that this experience feels every bit as Christmas-card perfect as it would in Lapland, or one of the northerly locations associated with sleigh rides. Peisey-Vallandry is one of the gateways to the Vanoise National Park, the oldest natural reserve of its kind in France. The local municipality is committed to preserving the area's unique biodiversity: both flora and fauna, like the native ibex. About 85% of its mountain area is undeveloped, making it feel like we really are in a natural winter wonderland.

In the evenings, we reward our newly acquired snow-plough-turn skills in the welcoming local restaurants with hearty fondues and local wines, and a more gourmet menu using seasonal ingredients at La Table d'Emma.

The Paradiski-run slopes have been entirely renovated over the past few years, with new lifts, panoramic terraces and cafes and a great interactive easy run, perfect for kids (and absolute beginners, like me). **TW**



BOOK IT

Club Med offers a seven-night stay in Peisey-Vallandry in December from £1,533 per person, based on two people sharing, including flights from Gatwick, transfers, all meals, drinks and sports activities. clubmed.co.uk



FROM TOP: Aerial view of Peisey-Vallandry; Hannah takes the reins of the sleigh

PICTURES: Photo Vallandry