



Let it snow

Tamara Hinson heads to Tignes to sample two of Mark Warner's chalets

I first visited Tignes 15 years ago when I spent a winter working in the French ski resort as a chalet girl. The main appeal was the free lift pass and the chance to snowboard six days a week.

It certainly wasn't the accommodation: my boyfriend (now husband) and I shared a basement room with a cracked window. On the coldest nights, wisps of snow would blow in.

So when I was invited to stay at Mark Warner's beautiful Chalet Hotel Aiguille Percée, I jumped at the chance. To start with, it's about as close to the slopes as you can get, with its location in Tignes' middle village, Le Lac. It

takes less than five minutes to walk from the boot room to the base of my two favourite lifts: the Palafour chairlift, which whisks skiers towards the spectacular Aiguille Percée rock formation, and the Tovièr. Opened in 2013, the latter is Tignes' newest gondola, and puts the entire resort, as well as neighbouring Val d'Isère, within easy reach.

CHALET HOTEL AIGUILLE PERCÉE

I've timed my visit well, arriving in the midst of a snowstorm that I'm assured will soon be replaced by blue skies. While I wait for the white-out to clear, I take the



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time to familiarise myself with the Chalet Hotel Aiguille Percée. A £2.7 million spruce-up in 2013 saw the original rooms upgraded, and the addition of 13 bedrooms, bringing the total up to 55. A new boot room was added, and the

bar and restaurant were enlarged.

However, it's the basement I'm most excited about. I find a pool, steam room and sauna, plus a Viva treatment room where Mark Warner's spa therapist works her magic on tired limbs and wind-burnt faces with a range of Elemis treatments.

I'm also wowed by the food, which is included in the price. At dinner there are different options for starters, main courses and desserts, and the wine is surprisingly good. (During my time as a chalet girl – working for a different tour operator, I should add – we joked that the hotel wine could double as de-icer.) ➔



➔ SMOOTH RIDE

My overriding impression is that everything is very streamlined at Mark Warner. Representatives from a local ski school turn up on the day of guests' arrival, so booking lessons is a breeze. Also on hand are guides from a local company offering other activities, including ice diving in Tignes' lake.

Guests can pre-order lift passes, so there's no trudging through the snow or queueing for photo machines. Speaking of which, there is now just one pass for the entire ski area, so guests don't need to fork out for an additional pass for days spent on the Val d'Isère side.

Not that there is much reason to go to Val d'Isère. Thanks to a variety of new developments, Tignes' huge ski area has become more accessible than ever before.

To start with, the newly created lower village of Tignes 1800 (just above Les Brévières, the resort's lowest point) now has even more to offer those wishing to base themselves

away from the bright lights of Le Lac and Val Claret. It has a real village feel and is especially popular with families. The pretty church at its heart is a replica of one that stood in the original village of Tignes, which was flooded prior to the construction of the nearby dam. This winter, a shiny new gondola, La Sache, will open, connecting it to Les Brévières.

Back in Le Lac, new chairlift Les Almes will serve one of Tignes' most popular blue slopes. No lift pass is required, so it's perfect for beginners taking to the slopes for the first time.

▶ CULINARY QUEENS

At the other end of the resort in Val Claret, Tignes' uppermost resort area, Club Med is planning a property but has yet to set an opening date. As with the brand's other ski hotels, the food will be a major selling point, with several restaurants and all meals included in the price.

But skip Tignes' wonderful restaurants at your peril. Whether it's



the beautiful eateries on the mountain – my favourite being La Tovièrre, at the top of the gondola of the same name, offering spectacular views and creamy hot chocolates – or those in the centre of town, Tignes has always laid claim to some of the top restaurants in the French Alps.

One of the best is Le Panoramic, with its Condé Nast-worthy decor – think tastefully draped sheepskin rugs along with artwork made from antlers. The menu is wonderfully diverse, featuring everything from bone marrow to burgers (albeit ones topped with foie gras), and the sprawling



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decking area, with its cosy fire pits, is a great place for people-watching on warmer days. It is reached via the Grande Motte funicular.



FAR LEFT AND CENTRE: Mark Warner's Chalet Hotel Aiguille Percée

LEFT: Le Panoramic restaurant

BELOW: Val Claret

ASK THE EXPERT



Joanne Kettley, travel consultant, Affinion Travel

"The food at Chalet Hotel Aiguille Percée was amazing, and I loved the comfy bar area where we'd go to relax before dinner. The decor makes it feel like a log cabin. But Chalet Hotel L'Ecrin was my favourite Mark Warner property in Tignes; I loved the location and felt there was more to do there. My favourite bit was the pool. There are water jets that massage your shoulders, and loungers in the water – just what your body needs after a hard day's skiing! I would recommend Tignes for all ages, and especially for families. It's also great for advanced skiers as there are many slopes to choose from. There are lots of challenging pistes, and great tree runs."

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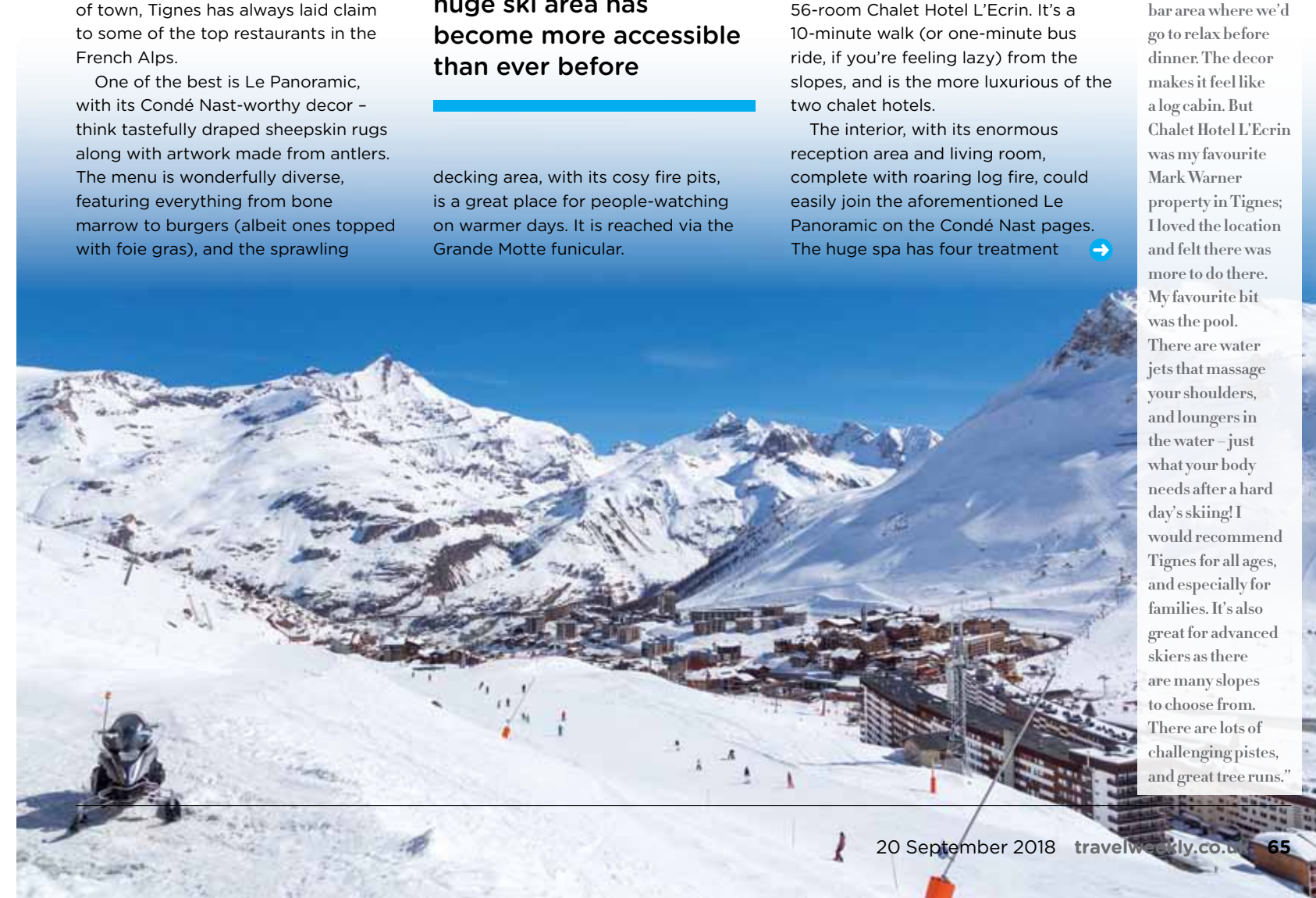
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ABOVE: The spa at Chalet Hotel L'Ecrin

→ rooms, a swimming pool, sauna, Turkish bath and Jacuzzi. Even getting dressed is a pleasure, thanks to handy glove and boot warmers.

The childcare area is larger than the one at Chalet Hotel Aiguille Percée, although I'd struggle to pick a favourite. Both have fantastic childcare facilities, but it's worth nothing that childcare programmes at both properties only accept children aged between one and 12 (in Mark Warner's other resorts, the programmes cater for children aged four months and older).

For me though, Chalet Hotel Aiguille Percée's location is hard to beat – whether you're part of a small group of friends planning on making the most of Tignes' best bars, a family keen to avoid long slogs to the nursery slopes, or an advanced skier looking for easy access to the enormous L'Espace Killy ski area, which includes Val d'Isère.

NEW BEGINNINGS

If you do find the time to make it over to the latter, you won't be disappointed. The resort's hottest



The resort's hottest news relates to Le Coin de Val, the French Alps' biggest project for 20 years

news relates to Le Coin de Val, a £170 million redevelopment project in the heart of the resort, and the biggest building project in the French Alps for 20 years.

Work began on the five-year project in late 2017. It's set to include new luxury hotels and chalets (creating around 900 extra beds), along with shops, restaurants and a dedicated, enclosed bus station.

It also has strong environmental credentials – snowmelt will be used for sanitation purposes, and geothermal energy will heat the rooms. Although, as I doze off in the cosy lounge at Chalet Hotel L'Ecrin, I realise I'm definitely more of a log fire kind of girl. **TW**



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ABOVE: Ski lift, L'Espace Killy

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