

Ready, steady, SNOW

Speed is of the essence for Emma Winton in French ski resort La Plagne

@enwinton

There's a 1,500-metre sheet of pure ice in front of me, and I'm about to be hurtled down it at 50mph. Sounds slightly terrifying? Yes, I thought so too.

Reluctantly, I put my helmet on and lower myself into the bobraft. One minute, 42 seconds later it's over – and after my apprehensive start, I'm pumped up enough to want to do it all over again!

This particular bobsleigh track is in French resort La Plagne, where specialist operator SkiBeat has brought us to hit the slopes for a week. One of only seven bobsleigh tracks

in Europe, it was built for the 1992 Winter Olympic Games in Albertville, France.

There's a choice of four vehicles to take you from top to bottom, ranging in speed from 50mph to the fastest of 75mph an hour, which – if you're brave enough to try it – means being driven by a professional in a replica of the four-man competition bobsleigh.

► THE RESORT

La Plagne is one of the world's most-visited ski resorts, spanning 11 'villages', each a self-sufficient mini-resort and all widely

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different in character. The ski area is best suited to families and lower intermediates. Of its 261 slopes, 135 are blue, so it's perfect for those looking for plenty of wide, gentle slopes, as

it's possible to cover the whole ski area just on blue runs.

La Plagne benefits from high altitude, with 70% of the ski area above 2,000 metres, meaning snow is pretty much guaranteed. And if there has been a lack of snowfall in parts, the resort is equipped with snowmaking facilities to ensure the slopes are well maintained.

It's not the first choice for the more experienced skier, but there are still a decent number of red and black runs – 37 of the latter – as well as a sufficient amount of off-piste skiing to keep them entertained. →

TOP TIP

Download the Paradiski YUGE app to check snow conditions and lift queues and for an interactive piste map



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High above the beginner and intermediate slopes is the 3,417-metre summit of Bellecote Glacier, where you can head for some difficult skiing and long off-piste descents, including Bellecote's North Face. Even if you don't want to ski down (and it is possible to get the bubble car back) it's worth making your way up to the glacier purely for the impressive views, as well as to visit the ice cave hosting some remarkable ice sculptures.

As a popular resort, it can become overcrowded in peak season, so despite recent improvements, there can still be frustratingly long waiting times at lifts, especially at the busiest times.

NEIGHBOURING RESORTS

The resort is linked with two others, Peisey-Vallandry and Les Arcs, which together form the giant Paradiski area covering 265 miles of ski runs.

Suggest clients get the ski pass to cover all three areas, as Les Arcs in particular has lovely wide, open slopes, making for a great day's skiing.

The three resorts are linked by the Vanoise Express cable car which takes only four minutes to cross. It can take up to an hour to get to the cable car from Plagne Centre, and clients will need to head back from Les Arcs at about 3.30pm to make the last lifts, so ensure they set aside a whole day.



LEFT: La Plagne

RIGHT: Guests on Ski Beat fam trip

BELOW: Super Tyro zip-line



Tried & Tested

CHALET FLORENCE, PLAGNE 1800

A snow-topped wooden cottage with a roaring log fire and chalet hosts to cook indulgent meals every day? Welcome to Chalet Florence, one of Ski Beat's largest chalets in La Plagne.

It sleeps up to 19 people in nine bedrooms (seven with en-suite bathrooms and one with a private spa bath), making it ideal for families or groups.

With a large open-plan lounge area, it is the perfect place to relax after a long day's skiing, preferably with a slice of the

freshly baked cake that is laid out every afternoon on return from the slopes. Breakfast and dinner are also freshly prepared by the chalet staff, with canapés followed by a three-course meal and complementary wine pairing.

The chalet is in the centre of Plagne 1800, with the nearest chairlift a 10-minute walk away. There is also the option to get a free shuttle bus which goes regularly to Plagne Centre and Plagne Bellecote from a bus stop just two minutes' walk from the chalet.



OTHER ACTIVITIES

La Plagne is well-equipped with other activities too. Skiers having a break from the slopes can try Super Tyro, a 600-metre zip-line which whizzes you along at up to 55mph through the snow-tipped trees from Aime 2000 to Plagne Centre.

Kids can have a go at dog-sledding, learning to become apprentice mushers by mastering basic techniques on a sled pulled by one or two dogs.

Colorado Park in Plagne Centre is home to a mile-long toboggan run – always a fun way to end your day on the slopes. And if you want to carry on skiing into the evening, try Moonlight Ski, where you can enjoy a sunset meal at the top of the mountain, before skiing back to La Plagne on blue runs,



Skiers having a break from the slopes can try Super Tyro, a 600-metre zip-line which whizzes you along at up to 55mph

by night, with a ski instructor.

For adrenaline junkies, La Plagne is a great place to come to try a bit of freestyle. It's home to a huge snowpark that sits above Plagne Centre, catering for people of all abilities, with jumps graded in the same way as the pistes, according to level of difficulty. Be

warned, the black jumps are huge!

The large proportion of families here means La Plagne is not particularly well known for its après-ski. There are a few bars and pubs in-resort, such as Le Mine Bar in Plagne 1800 and Scotty's Bar in Plagne Centre, which has live music in the evenings and is definitely the one to head to if you want a late night of dancing on tables and singing those all-time classics.

Book it: Ski Beat has a week's stay at the Chalet Florence from £482 per person, based on two sharing, including flights from Gatwick or Manchester, transfers and the services of a chalet host to prepare breakfasts, afternoon tea and three-course evening meals with wine for six days. skibeat.co.uk

ASK THE EXPERT



Laura Hazell, director, Ski Beat

Recommend clients book a high-altitude resort, as the snow in the past few years has been unpredictable, and there has been a shift in weather patterns. The snow seems to be coming much later on in the season in Europe, so clients will have a much better chance of getting good-quality snow higher up and booking that little bit later, between February and April. Find out exactly what clients are after from the holiday, including facilities for children, the après-ski and extra activities.



PICTURE: PHILIPPE ROYER