

# Is a £40,000 chalet ready for you?

At a new chalet for the super-rich, Nick Trend reveals exactly what guests get for their money

Unlimited Yveve Cliquot. It sounds like the stuff of dreams. Especially if you are a fan of the life-affirming effects of champagne. How would you respond to such an offer? Maybe I am getting old, but I actually found my own reaction surprisingly reassuring. Sure, my stomach may twitch more than I would have done if paying for each glass but a kind of self-restraint kicked in – at least after the first night of indulgence. This trial by temptation was staged when I spent a couple of days at Purple Ski's Chalet Inoko – the latest addition to its portfolio of top-end properties in Val d'Isère. And, to be honest, I felt a little uncomfortable when I learnt that the cost of renting the place for the whole of that week was €45,420 (£40,126). Although the champagne – and other drinks – were all on tap, that still didn't even include the flights, transfers, lift pass and lift hire.

For most of us, it is an impossibly large sum to be spending on a holiday, even in one of the world's best and most expensive ski resorts. And, as the effects of the Yveve Cliquot went off and my natural sense of frugality took over, I began to wonder if there was any way of justifying the expense. I will come to the maths in a minute, but first, what do you get for your money?

There is no doubt that it is a lovely place to stay. The newly built timber chalet is at the top of a steep track which leads up to the woods at the rear of the village, just a short walk from the main drag. There is one big living room on the top floor, with a long dining table, the fridge containing the champagne and expansive sofas in front of an open fire.

The aesthetic is certainly stylish, but it is quite hard to pin down. There is an extravagant array of fluffy lampshades, some well-stocked bookshelves and the main artwork is a life-sized still from a slightly off Vivienne Westwood photo shoot. The heads of four mountain goats mounted high on either side gaze down impassively.

Here, the windows overlook the valley and the mountains opposite and the view improves even further if

you move out onto the balcony and slip into hot tub. All in all it is an excellent space for a house party for a dozen or so guests.

So far, so good then. The six double bedrooms – which are all pretty compact – are on the two floors below, and you can squeeze the numbers up to 14, with a couple of children's bunk beds in an alcove next to one of the rooms.

In the basement there is an indoor pool (long and narrow), a treatment room (you can call in visiting therapists at extra cost) and a glass-walled sauna. There is also a cinema room – presumably aimed mostly at entertaining fractious children.

All in all then, in terms of space and facilities, the chalet is on a par with a mini five-star hotel. I would say the cooking was up to scratch too. This season Inoko has an excellent young chef, Hugo Akou – who serves breakfast and cooks up a four-course menu six nights a week – all included in the rental charge. On one night, for example, we had home-cured gravlax trout followed by aged fillet of beef – accompanied by bourdaes and burgundy wines, also part of the price.

Of course, you don't get the bars and the full-sized facilities of a five-star hotel. But you do get a lot of attention – from the two staff who run the chalet itself, and also from a team of drivers who will load up your skis and ferry you to the lifts each morning, as well as offering transfers to the restaurants and nightspots in the evenings.

Perhaps most importantly, what you get after a hotel is privacy. You can use the chalet as a party house or a discreet retreat. You can assemble your friends, celebrate an anniversary, gather your family or treat your workforce. And once you have forked out for the cost up front, you won't have to worry about how much champagne they drink.

So – if you are in the market for a top-end retreat – how do those costs work out in comparison with a pool hotel? Of course, you may be so rich that you don't worry about such things – but the key to making the chalet pay its way is to fill all the bedrooms, so you are dividing the cost most efficiently. Inoko sleeps 14 (including two children in the



▲ After a hard day on the slopes at Val d'Isère, left, retreat to luxury Chalet Inoko



bunk beds), so for my week it would have worked out at €3,244 (£2,865) per person, sharing a room for seven nights. When it comes to five-star hotels, Val d'Isère has a choice and they vary surprisingly in how much they charge. Hotel Christians in the middle of the resort is its longest-established and most traditional five-star. Staying here

is likely to work out considerably cheaper than Inoko at €2,030 (£1,793) per person for seven nights on the same January week that I was at Inoko. While that includes half board, as it does for all the hotels, you obviously have to pay extra for your drinks.

By comparison, Le Refuge de Soisae – a stylish conversion of a former lift station right up on the pistes at 2,500m – costs €2,737 (£2,417) half board. Add in drinks and wine each evening and you are pretty close to the overall price of the chalet.

Finally though, all these rates pale into insignificance against the cost of staying in Val d'Isère's newest and swankiest five-star, the Airelles, which costs €4,200 (£3,710) half board for a January week – €956 (£845) more than Inoko. And though that price does not cover drinks, it does include "a unique Alpine experience" such as a ski

lesson, or an ice climbing, paragliding, snowshoeing or dog sledding session.

Obviously, such equations won't trouble most of us, but if you are in that market it is worth doing the sums. And you might also be interested to know that though most top-end chalets sell out months before the season starts, there are often late deals on unsold weeks. Inoko is available for two weeks in March, for example, with 25 per cent discounts on offer. You don't tend to get quite such big reductions at a hotel.

Nick Trend was a guest of Purple Ski. A seven-night stay at Chalet Inoko, in Val d'Isère, costs from €45,420 (£40,126) including all meals and drinks. Flights and transfers cost extra. Spa treatments can be booked – best reserved in advance – and hire equipment can be delivered to and fitted in the chalet. Purple Ski (01885 488799; purpleski.com) offers two other chalets in Val d'Isère and six in Méribel and Courchevel

## Luxury Chalet v Hotel

How the costs compare in the world's leading resorts

### CHAMONIX

Chalet	Hotel
Colligne (01883 673242; colligne.com) offers Chalet Valluiba, with spectacular views of Mont Blanc, sleeping 12 people, from €21,750 (£19,770) in total or €1,815 (£1,598) per person, including airport transfers, minibas chauffeur service, afternoon tea daily and five dinners with wine.	This compares with a superior double at the four-star Hôtel Le Refuge des Aiglons (aiglons.com), starting at €1,700pp (£1,467), half board, but excluding the other extras.

Price difference per person: -€201 for the chalet

### MÉRIBEL

Chalet	Hotel
Purple Ski (01885 488799; purpleski.com) offers Chalet Arvill, sleeping 10, from €38,770 (£35,957) in total or €1,817 (£1,600) per person, including six dinners (this includes a 25 per cent late-booked discount on the normal price).	Hotel Le Kaila (lekaila.com) offers a signature room from €2,975pp (£2,461), B&B (£2,957) in total or €1,478 (£1,268) per person, including six dinners (this includes a 25 per cent late-booked discount on the normal price).

Price difference per person: -€661 for the chalet

### VERBIER

Chalet	Hotel
Ski Verbier Exclusive (01608 674033; ski-verbier.co.uk) has a three-bedroom, six-sleeper chalet, sleeping 10, at €119,000 (£7,877) for the week of April 9 to €124,000 (£1,288) per person, including five dinners, afternoon tea and all drinks.	The same week, a standard room at the five-star Verbier Marriott (m.com), in the centre, costs CHF 532p (£2,263), B&B. Meals and drinks cost extra.

Price difference per person: -€275 for the chalet

All prices are for the cheapest available seven-night stay during March unless stated otherwise, and are subject to current availability. Prices per person are based on full occupancy of the chalet or two people sharing a double hotel room