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# Ice floating, fat biking and world class food — is Val-d'Isère the perfect ski resort?

Elliot Wagland hits the slopes and discovers a world-class ski mecca



Val d'Isère ski resort / Elliot Wagland

By [Elliot Wagland](#) | 14 March 2023

Trending

**F**irst there was Covid, then a lack of [snow](#) but ski holidays are back — and back with a bang.

Tucked away under the soaring peaks of the [French Alps](#) near the Italian border lies the mountain resort of Val-d'Isère. With its breathtaking views and 150km of marked runs, it's a skiers' dream.

The last time I visited “Val” was more than 15 years ago as a fearless 20-something. My memories are a little hazy (I blame the apres-ski) but I mostly remember it being a fairly quiet place, with one main through-road with all the hotels just off the main drag. But now it’s different, Val-d’Isère has evolved into a world class resort, brimming with life and boasting exceptional bars and restaurants (notably Matsuhisa, which offers Japanese food with a Peruvian twist from world-renowned Chef Nobu).

But it offers a series of other attractions, including classical music concerts and a major leisure complex that has “5000m2 of fun, invigoration and relaxation in a friendly chilled-out setting”.

Christophe Lavaut, Managing Director of Val d’Isère Tourism, says: “This season is the symbol of a new start for the whole ski industry, and Val d’Isère is front of mind for all avid skiers. Open until May 6, the resort is offering its usual high altitude snow conditions, and we can sense how happy our visitors are to (re)discover the ski area, its extensive slopes and the village’s welcoming spirit.”

## **The resort**

Concerns that there would be a lack of snow after reports of a “snow drought” in Europe were quickly dispelled. Just days before my arrival, Val-d’Isère received a major dump of the white stuff. It was time to strap on my boots, clip on my skis and tackle the iconic face of Belvedere — which boasts a magnificent view of the Alps and the village down below.



Elliot Wagland in Val d'Isère / Elliot Wagland

## Where to stay

I holed up at [Chalet Jupiter](#), a luxury rental built in 2013 and situated just off the high street. From the outside it's understated, but step inside and it's an Alpine Aladdin's cave. It has four bedrooms, all with en suite bathrooms, though you'll have to draw straws for the master bedroom as it's spectacular. With its main lounge window framed around the snow-capped mountain view, it's worth taking a moment every morning to appreciate the sunrise. The chalet also features an option of a contactless catering service that includes all food and drink for the week.

Staff visit midweek to give it a full clean and change of towels and bed linen, but this is done during the day while you're out on the slopes. If you want a quiet night in, why not kick-off your boots, warm up by the log fire, and then dine in – before soaking up the moonlight in the outdoor Jacuzzi or relaxing on the huge leather sofas. For five-star dining or the best raclette the French Alps can offer, then that's a different story.



Jupiter Chalet is located 10 minutes' walk from central Val d'Isère. / Ski France

## Restaurant on the slopes

Mountaintop restaurant [Gigi Val d'Isère](#), located inside the former cable car station of Solaise, serves Italian cuisine against the backdrop of the majestic Vanoise National Park. Residing at an altitude of 2,551 metres, you'll be forgiven for taking your time during lunch to soak up the surroundings, either indoors or on the outdoor veranda.

The menu features the likes of linguine al manzo (beef linguine), lasagna do Gigi or, if you're feeling a little more adventurous before your afternoon ski session, there's always spezzatino di polpo (stewed octopus in a red wine sauce). You're paying a little more for the views but it's reasonable and every dish is beautifully presented — you'll leave satisfied, loaded with carbs and ready to go again.



Gigi Val d'Isère / Supplied

## Restaurant in town

If you're looking for coolest restaurant in town look no further than Matsuhisa. The brainchild of Chef Nobu himself, and the first and only Matsuhisa restaurant in the French Alps. Signature favourites such as yellowtail jalapeño, black cod miso and Suntory whisky cappuccino dishes all make welcome appearances. Japanese cuisine with Peruvian influences is handcrafted and presented in ways synonymous with Mr Matsuhisa.

Staff go the extra mile to cater for every dietary requirement and make you feel comfortable as an ultra-cool DJ quietly adds to this incredible and cathartic dining experience. The restaurant is set within an elegant Japanese-style Alpine wonderland featuring a dark colour palate, black marble tables and velvet everywhere.



Matsuhisa / Supplied

## **Extracurricular activities**

After a morning of zipping down the slopes, I decided to try a spot of “ice floating” — bobbing up and down in a manmade hole in frozen Lac de l’Oulliette. Apprehensive at first, I imagined I’d have steel myself and channel my inner Wim Hoff, but it turned out I had nothing to worry about. Following a short stroll down from the instructor’s ‘office’ — an igloo — I made my way to the three-metre square cut in the middle of the lake.

I donned a huge bright orange dry suit and soon I was in, floating in a frozen lake, up a mountain with a warm herbal tea in hand. Bobbing around in total silence with my fellow ‘floaters’ I felt complete serenity. A surreal experience — and not a drop of lake water breached my suit.



Relax in a manmade hole in frozen Lac de l'Oulliette / Supplied

If you want to explore a different side of Val d'Isère then fatbiking is a great way to do it. With over-sized chunky tyres, these electric bikes are a great way to unwind and require very little effort. [Wattsup Fatbikes](#) in the heart of Val d'Isère is the brainchild of former downhill racer Frederik Van Buynde, along with his parents, who happily guide you every step of the way through the snow and mountains. They also offer tailor-made tours with their incredible Wattsup team.



Wattsup Fatbikes are based in the heart of Val d'Isère / Elliot Wagland

Their knowledge of the local vicinity and surrounding wildlife is second to none but be warned — wrap up warm so you don't get caught out when the sun goes down.

## Details

A Contactless Catered seven-night stay at Chalet Jupiter based on eight people costs £800pp with Ski France; [skifrance.co.uk](http://skifrance.co.uk)

Ski passes cost €63 a day for adults for the full area of Tignes and Val d'Isère, and are free for under 8s. If you are purchasing a six-day ski pass you receive the seventh day for free.