



My family reunited on the ski slopes after 15 years of holidaying apart

## Can you recapture the joy of a family holiday when parents become grandparents and toddlers are in tow? We went to Val d'Isère to find out

[Lucy Aspden-Kean](#), COMMISSIONING EDITOR

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A lot can happen in 15 years. Since the last time I went on holiday with my two brothers and our parents the world has seen six [British prime ministers](#), the invention of Instagram, an unmanned landing on Mars, three [royal weddings](#) and a global pandemic.

My family make-up also looks very different to when I was 16 years old and we last holidayed together as a five in the Austrian resort of Rauris in 2008. Via marriages, house moves, retirements and two births, our lives have changed and our holidaying habits have grown apart.





The Aspden family in Rauris, Austria, back in February 2008

One thing that has endured, however, is our family's shared passion for the outdoors. So, when tasked with finding the best way to celebrate our parents' milestone ruby wedding anniversary, the [ski slopes](#) were always going to be the venue of choice.

Organising a three-generation skiing holiday was no simple task. To begin with I had to find a resort that would cater for the entire spectrum of skiing ability – from five-year-old Charlie who'd never worn a pair of ski boots and his father who last skied over a decade ago, to my “are we going on piste” husband and gung-ho retiree father. Variety would be key and that favourite of the British Val d'Isère presented the perfect solution – a vast snow-sure ski area and a bustling village with plenty of activities and character on the slopes.



Next, where to stay? Our last outing on the slopes together had been a no-frills, half-board package hotel. But with a milestone to celebrate and matured tastes, a private chalet seemed more befitting. I was eager to avoid the logistical challenges of self-catering, but was deterred by the dwindling number of catered options in the Alps.

One operator that has bucked this trend is Ski France. Its “contactless” catered chalets, launched during the “social distancing” pandemic era, allow groups to holiday together without any interaction with staff. The appeal of the concept, which gives extra privacy and a total control over the holiday schedule, has lingered. With everything in place, the Aspen party was en route to the French Alps for February half term.

Chalet Arosa is the quintessential Alpine bolthole, sitting on a quiet hillside 15 minutes’ walk, or short ski bus ride, from the resort centre, and with a picture-perfect wooden exterior. Spread across four floors, with an open-plan living room, cosy mezzanine and

sun-lled terrace with hot tub, there's ample space for a family to spread out. On arrival, the celebratory champagne was on ice and the giant fridge freezer crammed with delights left for us by our host, Agnes.



The family headed to the French Alps for the trip

Agnes was always on hand, but – in a 21st-century twist – I never actually met her in person. We communicated over WhatsApp both before and during our trip, and she checked in daily to make sure nobody was going hungry. We were delivered ample daily breakfast ingredients and on six nights a three-course evening meal of epic proportions, ranging from traditional tarti ette to stir-fry beef and duck parmentier, with extra options for fussy eaters – all we had to do was read the heating instructions and argue over who was loading the dishwasher.

## The best ski resorts for multigenerational skiing families

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We also had a direct line to an in-resort driver – Logen was waiting promptly outside the chalet each morning ready to take us to the slopes at our chosen time. He returned to the piste-side in the evening to ferry us back to base, or the nearest bar. It was a seamless experience, without any intrusions. There were no worries about wearing your pyjamas to breakfast, and no frowning faces when we stayed a little too late at après.

Planning the holiday had been a learning curve, but nothing prepared me for what it would be like to ski as a family of 10.



Fatbikes are an alternative way to explore the slopes | CREDIT: Bonnet Caroline Photographie



Our debut morning was nothing short of chaotic, with a scramble to get on the slopes in time for the first lift or ski school lesson. We soon learnt that the secret to a large family getaway was accepting that it is impossible to spend every moment together. Choosing to divide and conquer instead, the novices visited the Intersport equipment shop, where pre-booked rentals were waiting, while the other, more experienced skiers warmed up and headed off to explore Val's 300km (186 miles) of slopes.

It was a tactic that served us well throughout the week and kept any squabbling at bay – in the morning we'd go our separate ways, leaving the chalet at our own pace, and while some chose to ski hard until lunch (the top-to-bottom run from the summit of Tignes's Grande Motte glacier with my father was a particular highlight), take lessons or soak in the hot tub, we agree to regroup as the mercury rose at lunchtime. This is when Val d'Isère's Solaise mountain came into its own and I began to see how ski holidays can help bring scattered families back together.

On this beginner-focused mountain, which underwent a €16million redevelopment in 2016 to reconfigure its pistes, we were able to connect as an entire family. The beginners (and their tentative skiing granny) were at home on the nursery slopes, sledding or sunning themselves in a deckchair, and the more advanced among us, having had our thrills before lunch, were content to cruise the bowl of wide and flowing blue runs.





Be sure to pick a resort with slopes for skiers of all ages

After three days of lessons under the watchful eye of Franci from Supreme Ski School, the youngest generation were confident enough to venture further and we were able to share our first chairlift as a family. I caught a glimpse of my parents' faces as we disembarked at the top of the Madeleine lift: a look of pride, gratitude and disbelief that this was happening at all – 15 years is a long time to wait for the type of memories only holidays can deliver.

On the slopes, not a day went by without making more memories – ice skating, swimming and playing retro video games in Le Pub. Such variety, and no opportunity to let boredom prevail, proved to be another secret to multigenerational harmony. One afternoon, my brothers and I engaged in some long-overdue sibling bonding (i.e. rivalry) on a fatbike tour of the unspoilt Manchet Valley, while the children's highlight was joining Gramps on the twilight treetop adventure course – a challenge of rope ladders, swings and obstacles illuminated in the forest above the slopes.

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On the final day of our holiday, the Aspden family was steadily snaking down the Col de la Madeleine piste one final time. Leading the way, with my niece Martha following closely in my tracks (now eagerly inquiring “can we do this every year?”), I had to remind myself to pause for a moment to take it all in. This holiday had been 15 years in waiting and, having reunited the family on the slopes, as we came to the bottom, grinning with shared delight, I knew the next couldn’t come a moment too soon.

## Essentials

[Ski France](#) (0203 475 4756) offers a week’s stay at Chalet Arosa from £11,087 total, for up to 10 people sharing on a Contactless Catered Service. Return transfers from Geneva to Val d’Isère with [MV Transport](#) cost €855 (£735) for eight people. Five days’ tuition with [Supreme Ski School](#) costs from €499 (£429), daily rental with [Intersport](#) costs from €8 (£6.90).

*Lucy and her family were guests of Ski France and Val d’Isère Tourism.*

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