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# Celebrating teen spirits

Skiing with hungry teens? An all-inclusive option at family-friendly Hôtel Le Mottaret in Meribel is the answer for Beverley Fearis

**Y**ou go to bed, Mum. I won't wake you," says Freddie, without even looking up. He's playing spoons, a card game taught to him earlier that evening by his new mates – 14-year-old twins Miles and Ava, and Anna, 16. They'd met over a game of pool a few nights before and are now the best of buddies.

The twins and Anna are here with their ski-mad dads, their not-so-mad-about skiing mums opting to stay home. "My wife used to come but she's not as keen – or as adventurous – as us. She's going on a yoga retreat instead this year," Anna's dad tells me. It's a scenario increasingly unfolding in my own friendship group – the kids get hooked, bolder, faster, and eventually one parent gets left behind. Skiing holidays are a big expense, after all.

All single parents for the week, we've come to the three-star Hôtel Le Mottaret in Meribel, a 77-room, ski-in-ski-out, family-friendly hotel where you can go B&B, half board or all-inclusive. With hungry, growing teenagers, we've wisely opted for the latter, which means breakfast, lunch and dinner plus unlimited snacks and drinks 10am-10pm. Sweet-toothed Freddie gets his money's worth on the marshmallow and cream-topped hot chocolates alone, and is more easily persuaded to leave the slopes every afternoon on the promise of an après ski doughnut. Meanwhile, I'm loving the cocktails and the unlimited (and decent) wine with dinner, but more about the food later.

As the name suggests, our hotel is in Meribel-Mottaret, a purpose-

built but still pretty 1750m resort, with wood-clad Savoyard chalets and views of Mont Vallon. Just above the centre of Meribel (1500m), Mottaret is arguably the most well-connected spot in the Three Valleys, the world's largest linked ski area, blessing skiers with access not only to the slopes of Meribel but also to neighbouring heavyweights, Courcheval and Val Thorens – 600km in total.

We fully appreciate the scale and majesty of these famous mountain valley triplets when we see them from above on a light aircraft flight with Aéroclub de Méribel ([www.ac-meribel.com](http://www.ac-meribel.com)). Skiing straight into Méribel's retro Altiport like we're in a James Bond film, we unclip our skis and swap our ski boots for shoes to clamber on board our four-seater plane for an exhilarating ride. Headsets on, our experienced pilot points out the landmarks over the whirr of the engines. The snow-covered peaks are now at eye level, reaching in all directions, and we're surprised by the amount of forests. Freddie excitedly recognises our hotel thanks to its large terrace and fairy-lit trees. Flights start from a surprisingly affordable £60 each (15 minutes) and are well worth it.

But, of course, skiing is the main attraction. Our visit is in the second week of April and on our first day we have to go high to get decent snow. We take the cable car to brave the Combe du Vallon, the longest piste in the Three Valleys and, at 2952m, the highest point in Meribel. As we approach the summit, the clouds clear and we get a glimpse across the Parc National de la Vanoise. It's a

bumpy 3.2km down and we start off taking it slow and steady. At first, I stay at the rear but it's soon clear that Freddie is now the more competent skier, so we switch. He wants to take the Mures Rouges lift and do it all again but, my quads already burning,

*Isip my margarita and watch as holiday friendships are made*



**Skiing in Meribel, main; the Hotel le Mottaret, above**

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I convince him it can wait until another day, and instead we stick to some gentler blues.

Before dinner, we join other guests in the hotel lounge and I settle into one of the red velvet bucket chairs close to the pool table where the twins are playing. Freddie is watching them and, as I hope, their dad notices and tells Miles to invite him for a game. Typical teenagers, they're self-conscious at first, but they're soon teasing each other over bad shots and challenging each other to a rematch. I sip my margarita and watch as holiday friendships are made.

We head downstairs together to the restaurant for the all-you-can-eat buffet – tonight a fabulous fish feast. The food here is a notch above what I've experienced in other ski hotels. We tuck into trays of sumptuous sushi, piles of smoked salmon and some of the best oysters I've ever tasted. One night is Mexican night and there are fajitas, chillies and nachos with salsa and freshly-made guacamole, the waiting staff in sombreros. The desserts are delicious too, with child-pleasing chocolate cake and brownies, in bite-sized portions so you can try all of them. Freddie is in foodie heaven.

Overnight, there's a heavy dump and we wake to perfect powdery snow and blue skies. We head over to Courcheval where the highlight is the long, winding Plan Fontaine, a beautiful tree-lined green run from the Bouc-Blanc area that sweeps all the way down to La Tania, with gorgeous views across the Courcheval valley. We bump into the twins and their dad and ski together for a while, although Miles has recently switched to snowboarding and is struggling to keep up, so we part ways. The conditions are perfect and we ski until the lifts close.

That night, it's the weekly pool party, when the kids are invited to join some of the hotel's patient staff for fun and games in the indoor pool. Parents of the younger children stick around

on the poolside recliners, trying to chat over the splashing and screams of laughter. Those with teenagers, like me, retreat to the poolside sauna

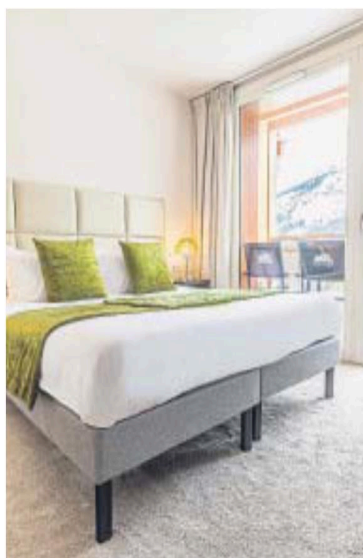
or steam room for some quiet time. The hotel also has an outdoor hot tub, which can be booked (for free) by the half hour.

Freddie, Miles, Ava and Anna are too 'cool' to join in with the pool games but are still having fun, hopping in and out of large pool, dodging the inflatables, and into the bubbling indoor hot tub. Us grown-ups make the most of the all-inclusive drinks and the kids have yet another hot chocolate. It's creeping towards 11pm and I'm ready for bed but Freddie, his face glowing, clearly isn't. I'm holidaying with a teenager now, who wants more freedom and independence – and great skiing – and the Hôtel Le Mottaret is the perfect place. Of course, I'm still awake when he creeps in an hour later, but I pretend I'm sleeping. I know it won't be the last time.

*A week at Hôtel Le Mottaret, with Kids Go Free (all kids up to 18 on same board basis as their parents) costs from £1,107 B&B, £1,400 half board, and £1,791 all-inclusive, based on two adults and two children sharing. Seven nights with one adult and one child sharing starts at £647 B&B, £867 half board and £1,160 all-inclusive. Ski France, 0203 475 4756, [www.skifrance.co.uk](http://www.skifrance.co.uk). EasyJet return flights Edinburgh to Geneva from £51pp. Return private transfers for up to eight from Geneva from £549 with Ski France's transfer company, MV Transport.*

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The hot tub at the Hotel le Mottaret, above; one of the bedrooms, top