



Hurting down a hill on a piece of plastic? We haven't smiled so much in ages

The drive up the mountains towards the beautiful French town of Vaujany has everything you'd expect from an Alpine approach. Perched on the...



Perched on the mountainside, not too far a drive from Grenoble, the winding roadsides are dusted with just enough postcard-worthy precipitation to raise any winter holidaymakers' excitement levels, while the buildings are suitably rustic and welcoming.

As scenic as the welcome, the success of any trip like this is built on coming down a mountain, rather than ascending it. Thankfully, this little corner of the French Alps certainly does not disappoint in either.

At an altitude of 1,250m, the gorgeous former farming community is surrounded by breathtaking vistas, such as the Massif des Grandes Rousses, that will fill your camera roll before you even get your boots fitted. It's a brilliant destination for seasoned skiers and newbie face-planters alike and is particularly welcoming to those with kids in tow.

As guests of snowsport holiday specialists **Ski France**, I checked into the stunning Hotel Les Cimes, right in the middle of Vaujany, with my 11 and 15-year-old sons. Both lads were super excited to make their slopes debut, while I was looking forward to enjoying my favourite sport with my favourite wee people for the first time.

Most importantly, of course, I was determined to show off some proper snow skills to look cool in front of the kids, which seems to get ever harder as I get older, and they get wiser.

Having only ever enjoyed dry slope adventures before, the lads were thrilled to be going to the Alps for their first real snow days, over the Christmas period last year. The setting was perfectly festive, and we all hoped for some great runs as an early gift from the big red guy.

We started on the first level, Montfrais, for our warm-up runs and it couldn't have been a smoother introduction for both snow debutants and experienced riders. It's got lovely criss-crossing green and



blue runs, allowing for a gentle ease into the day.

The network of lifts, gondolas and cable cars departing from Vaujany is easy to navigate, and offers access to the range of runs, schools and resorts connected to the mountain range, with great tows and even travelators on hand to get piste-ready. As befits a very family-friendly resort, the ski and snowboard schools were top class.

My 15-year-old chose skiing, while the youngest chose to follow the example of his board-crazy dad by opting for snowboard lessons. While they did different sports, the boys both had an amazing time, and some brilliant downhill action.

The older one was given great advice on developing his technique and control as he gained further experience on his skis, while my youngest was treated to fab one-on-one time with a teacher passing on balance, speed and control tips to the budding young rider.

There are a range of lesson options for all ages and levels of experience, and all the little ones in our group were well taken care of.

Seeing your kids having fun and learning a great skill is great. But another, more selfish, benefit of a ski school is that it also frees up mums and dads to enjoy some slopes time as well.

In 25 years of snowboarding, I've rarely had so much fun. The different areas and pistes are so easy to find your way around and the Alpette runs above Montfrais were drenched in sunshine with breathtaking views on all sides; winter sports heaven.

The only downside, sadly, was when the wide open nature of the range meant that my kids had a great view of their dad wiping out after missing a turn. Cool, I was not.

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But as much fun as a solo zoom can be, the point of this trip was engaging in family fun, so after reuniting for a legendarily filling hilltop lunch at Les Airelles mountainside restaurant, we swapped the boards and skis for some Alpine-grade sledging.

It may be less sophisticated and stylish than cutting across powder or taking a great toe edge, but there's much more laughing and silliness, and hurtling down on wee plastic toboggans proved the perfect way to cap day one. The adults were smiling just as widely as anyone up there.

Crucial to any successful winter holiday is always going to be what happens when you get back down to the resort. Vaujany has families well covered here too, especially after an exhausting day at altitude.

The very vertical town is cleverly equipped with a series of lifts and escalators to help aching muscles and joints traverse the different streets and levels, and there's plenty of fun to find.

The Sportscenter features a swimming pool with flume slides and water polo goals – a must for competitive dads and teens. But male holiday makers be wary, the classic Bermuda or boardshorts



styles are forbidden, so you'll need skin tight shorts or trunks to get in.

More forgiving, thankfully, is the dress code for the adjoining ten-pin bowling alley, where hired shoes are the only requirement.

Nearby, there's also a museum of local culture and history, featuring a very popular flight simulator game which will have kids queuing through the building.

The town is filled with great dining options but you'd be hard pressed to do better than our Hotel les Cimes feasts, including quality fondue and steak dishes, and great junior options including nuggets, burgers and pasta.

The spacious but boutique residence is a perfect spot for travelling with kids. We enjoyed a comfortable family room, with a blockbuster view every morning as we enjoyed a filling breakfast. A five-minute walk from the ski lift and hire shops, it's well equipped with a boot and equipment room, and everything you'll need.

Having conquered the Montfrais and Alpette slopes, day two saw us head over to the Alpe D'huez resort, a busy but beautiful area where different runs merge into one valley, full of all kinds of enticing restaurants and bars.

It's also where you can find new and exciting ways to enjoy the snowscape, such as dog-sled rides.

The husky adventure proved to be a real highlight of our trip. We channelled our inner Jack London as we were bundled into a narrow sled tethered to a pack of incredibly cute and noisy hounds who'll drag you across the mini-tundra at a decent speed. It's thrilling, and the kind of experience to treasure with your kids.

Alpe D'Huez is also home to some great outdoor bars to enjoy a stein of local brew, and great restaurants such as Au Trappeur, full of carb heavy treats like gourmet burgers, and it's definitely worth a visit from the base in Vaujany.

The whole area is one of the most picturesque, welcoming and thrilling ski resorts I've ever visited, and it's welcoming to all ages and all levels. The vibe in the town and on the mountain is chilled out, exhilarating, and all about having fun at your own pace, in your own way.

Even if you can't look cool in front of your kids.

Brian and his family were guests of **Ski France** (0203 475 4756, www.skifrance.co.uk).

Return flights from Edinburgh to Grenoble cost from £56 pp with easyJet.

The Hôtel Les Cimes in Vaujany offers a week's stay for the 2024/25 ski season from £709 total for two people sharing a room including breakfast, or from £982 total for a family of four (two adults and two children) sharing a room for a week. During the Easter Holidays the price is £1,123 total for a family of four.

Six-day ski passes for the Oz-Vaujany ski area cost from €204.50 (£172.14) per adult and from €158 (£133) per child (age 5-12). Six-day ski passes for the Alpe d'Huez grand domaine ski area cost from



€310 (£261) per adult and from €244 (£205.39) per child. vaujanskicompany.com/useful-info/lift-passes/

Transfers with MV Transport (part of **Ski France**): mvtransport.fr/en

Husky Sledding at Centre Équestre du Second Souffle 30 minutes, is €60 (£50.51)per adult or €35 (£29.47) for children under 12.

Ski classes: Prices from €39.57 pp per lesson: www.vaujany.com/en/skiing/ski-school-esf/