

*Escape***Off-piste catering on the slopes***Stay in this Alpe d'Huez chalet and have gourmet French food delivered to your door*by **ANDREW****GREGORY**

A GROUP of young Americans leaned casually on the walls of the gondola as we ascended into the grey sky. I asked one of them: 'Did you do the black run from the top?'

'Yeah,' he said, 'but it's so icy we had to scoot on our butts the whole way down.'

I'd quite fancied the challenge of Alpe d'Huez's La Sarenne, at ten miles the longest black run in Europe and a drop of 1,650m from its 3,300m starting point.

But all the talk of scooting on butts made me think again.

I chickened out, especially as we had driven to the Alps and I didn't fancy working out how to get home with one leg in plaster. But there was always dinner to look forward to. And what dinners they were, thanks to a brilliantly innovative idea from Ski France that came about during the 2020 Covid lockdowns.

It's called 'contactless catering' – and the concept is simple: every day, luscious, ready-made three-course dinners are delivered with drinks at each catered chalet with detailed instructions on how to heat and present them. Pastries and baguettes are left at the door each morning, plus a snack.

Over a week, Ski France cater on six nights (they have Tuesdays off) with locally-made food, thanks to Paris-trained chef Yvon Deveau, who runs the village's delicatessen, Alpe Traiteur.

His guiding principle is that everything leaving his kitchen – from the fresh pasta to the virtuoso walnut tartlets – is made from scratch. Day one was a starter of bruschetta, a main course of beef bourguignon with tagliatelle, followed by apple tart

with cream.

The company has 50 contactless-catered chalets across the French Alps.

Alpe d'Huez has everything a family of differing ski abilities would want: a choice of ski schools, two big areas for lessons, reassuring green (the easiest) slopes, as well as plenty of challenging runs.

For those brave enough, there's the world-famous Le Tunnel.

It starts at the resort's highest point and features, you've guessed it, a tunnel, deceptively kind before dropping away, along with your stomach, down a testing black run. And no, I didn't do that one either. Alpe d'Huez – famed as a staging point on cycling's Tour de France after one of its fiercest uphill sections – is a buzzing Alpine village.

It will be interesting to see if 'contactless catering' catches on. It certainly made an impression on me.

TRAVEL FACTS

One week at Chalet La Chapelle costs from £914pp based on 14 people sharing on a contactless catered price during the 2024/2025 ski season (skifrance-premium.co.uk). Easyjet flies from London to Grenoble return from £48 (easyjet.com)

> 27 November 2024 at 0:00



Buzzing: Alpe d'Huez with some of the locally sourced cuisine on offer (inset)