



The British ski favourite revitalised by a €350m makeover

A series of investments and upgrades have secured the position of Les Deux Alpes as a resort of the future

With glorious, long piste descents, one of Europe's best terrain parks and an altitude that guarantees snow, Les Deux Alpes in the southern French Alps always had plenty going for it. However, a major infrastructure refit – including five new lifts, notably the long-heralded Jandri 3s – has secured its position as a French resort of the future. A popular destination for British skiers, readily accessed from Lyon or Grenoble, the story of Les Deux Alpes began in 1939 with a simple tow rope up the mountain. By the “golden age” of French ski development in the Seventies, a network of lifts had been created to make what was, for the time, a truly forward-looking resort. “Les Deux Alpes was then a leader in the field, an example to other resorts,” Mayor Stéphane Sauvebois told The Telegraph. Owing to a lack of investment, however, as other resorts forged ahead, “our position declined”, he continued. Intending to regain its profile and to future-proof the resort, in 2020 Les Deux Alpes forged a new partnership with lift operator SATA – the company also behind neighbouring Alpe d'Huez and La Grave – and a €350 million redevelopment was agreed. Sandwiched between two valleys, the town of Les Deux Alpes runs along a ridge roughly a mile long, at a height of 1,650m. To the west is a smaller ski area, the Vallée Blanche, while the main slopes rise to the east, up to Glacier de Mental – at 3,600m, and one of the highest, most snowsure, in France. From here the piste map expands across cruisy red runs and blue pistes, as well as 800 hectares of freeride terrain. Developers wasted no time in reigniting the resort's potential. “By 2023 our ability to get around the Vallée Blanche side was transformed, with the Super Venosc gondola and the Vallée Blanche telemix [cable car and chair lift],” said Alex Armand, who has run Tip Top Ski Coaching in Les Deux Alpes for 15 years. This winter the Vallée Blanche, which rises to 2,100m, also opened “a fantastic easy green run, which opens the sector to beginners.” Novices are also spoilt across the valley with another new green piste, at a thaw-proof 3,200m. Should the resort's lower slopes lack snow in a warmer future, there are now diverse high-altitude options for all levels. In the main ski area, the investment project's first new lifts were Diable Télémix (2022) and the Belle Étoile Télémix (2023). The flagship however is the Jandri 3s – the backbone of the resort, rising from the centre up to 3,200m – which replaces the Jandri Express and opened earlier this winter. Costing an eye-watering €148 million, the new lift more than halves the time to the top of the mountain (17 minutes, instead of the previous 40 minutes) and doubles capacity (3,000 people up each hour, compared to 1,700). It's also stormproof, remaining stable in winds up to 100kmph. Many moons ago, when I skied in Les Deux Alpes as a student, alongside memories of glorious untracked snow fields I had less fond recollections of the long queue and the slow, chilly Jandri ride to reach them. This winter, there was the briefest line, and the ride up was warm, quiet and quick; the right length of time to eat a baguette. “Now, in a two-hour lesson, I can go up Jandri twice, and therefore go twice as far – or make twice as many turns,” added Armand. For the brave (and skilled) the new Jandri 3s – along with two tow lifts and a short hike – also makes it quicker to access renowned rider paradise La Grave under the care of a local guide. As part of its futureproofing plans, Les Deux Alpes is taking care to foster its environmental credentials too. Great consideration was taken during the building of the new Jandri 3s not to contaminate local water (a purification plant was set up on-site), the lift uses far less energy (like the rest of the resort it's powered mainly by hydroelectricity, and a small amount of solar), and the heat emitted by the lift machinery is captured to heat the stations. This winter, I found the town different too. The redevelopment includes better out-of-town car parks to drive traffic



away from the resort centre and a fleet of electric buses. At all price points, hotels have been upgraded (a spoiling addition being the spa in the Chamois Lodge) and many of the central apartment buildings have been internally refurbished, with more charming external renovations too. Next year there will also be a new swimming pool and ice rink. Some things remain the same though in this future gazing resort. I remembered the great value of my previous visit – and was pleasantly surprised this season when a magnificent plate of truffled ham and comté omelette cost €19 on the mountain at La Fée Restaurant. Even at new hotspot Monsieur K a plate of oysters is a hardly punitive €18. “The vibe really hasn’t changed, it is still really welcoming,” said Matt Hague, from Bedfordshire, who has owned a chalet here for seven years. “The new infrastructure is amazing; all along the town there are now high-speed lifts, giving so many opportunities to get up the hill.” Essentials **Ski France** (0203 475 4756) offers a week’s stay in Hotel Ibiza from £250 per night per room in a quadruple Superior Room, B&B, plus a ‘kids go free’ offer. A week’s adult ski pass costs from €311 (£260). Equipment hire costs from £6.65 a day, including skis, helmet, poles and boots with intersportrent.com. easyJet flies from London Gatwick to Grenoble for £137; 1h30 transfer. Rebecca was a guest of Les Deux Alpes.