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PEAK CHIC

Once a place for hard skiing and harder après-skiing, Val d'Isère is now a luxurious alpine wonderland

WORDS WILL MOFFITT

Glinting 1,400 metres up above the lift station, Val d'Isère's La face de Bellevarde was fashioned into the world's steepest giant slalom course for the 1992 Albertville Winter Olympics. Etched into alpine folklore and the resort's DNA, the white-knuckle run will forever be synonymous with those knife-edge races that beamed into living rooms around the world, crystallising "Val's" reputation as a high altitude playground for serious skiers.

Still blessed with ample snow due to its lofty altitude and its colossal artificial snow "factory", today's Val d'Isère is a chic, cosmopolitan resort brimming with luxury hotels, high-end restaurants and boutiques. The palatial five-star hotel Airelles is the latest jewel in a hospitality portfolio that is becoming ever more polished.

There are plenty of chalets too, most of them dotted around the village. Fusing rustic alpine charm with contemporary flourishes, Chalet Jupiter has floor-to-ceiling French doors, a roaring log fire and a balcony with a Jacuzzi. The chalet also offers a fitting service that comes direct to the door; ideal in a blizzard.

The resort is perfectly put together with slick lift service and 153 pistes to ski on. The off-piste is excellent, but newbies are advised to traverse tougher terrain with guides

and to lay off La face de Bellevarde after a long afternoon in La Folie Douce. Birthed here long before it conquered the Alps, the après-skiing mecca remains riotously popular.

For those with more refined tastes, Gigi serves up delicately presented Italian dishes and eye-watering views across Vanoise National Park and René, a family-owned restaurant on the Mangard slope, prepares its meaty dishes in an open kitchen.

In town, Airelles hotel has three top restaurants: La Grande Ourse, serving traditional Savoyard treats, Loulou bringing la dolce vita to the Alps and Matsuhisa, a contemporary Japanese-style restaurant helmed by the eponymous Nobu creator where resident DJs spin funk-pop remixes long into the night.

For non-skiers there are still plenty of options, including ice floating on the Ouillette lake or fatbiking, where former downhill racer Frederik Van Buynder beckons you through twisting mountain trails.

This growing roster of non-skiing activities exemplifies the resort's wilful evolution. Still faithful to its hard skiing roots, Val d'Isère is looking beyond the slopes to accommodate an increasingly diverse clientele.

Seven nights catered at Chalet Jupiter costs £800 pp for eight people. SkiFrance.co.uk

