



Mottaret is the secret to affordable family skiing in Les Trois Vallées

Discover snow-sure and sunny Méribel-Mottaret with kids this winter for the most affordable family French Alps holidays in Les Trois Vallées



Mottaret in Le Trois Vallées is often overshadowed by nearby Méribel and Courchevel for family French Alps holidays, and that's exactly why you should go, as Finn Thompson found out.

My hands are near-frozen and my ski technique has completely gone out of the window, but my spirits have never been higher. The suggestion of a tartiflette has just arisen after a vigorous morning zooming up and down long, snowy pistes.

To our total delight, within minutes, out from the December fog a blackboard with the dish emblazoned across its front emerges and beckons us into a picture-perfect Alpine cabin, and we bundle in. A cheerful maitre d' welcomes us as though we could be long-lost friends, and it's not long before we're warming up over gulps of vin chaud and mouthfuls of potato enrobed in bubbling French cheese.

This is what skiing in the Alps is all about.

We are skiing in the largest network of pistes in the entire world, Les Trois Vallées, and while this may sound daunting, it is anything but.

Runs are all incredibly well-signposted and people are more than happy to help, whether it's the guy operating the chairlift or a ski rental team. Most crucially perhaps, is that the area is brilliantly suited to skiers of all levels.

Beginner? Head over to the lower parts of Méribel for picturesque green runs everywhere you look. Skiing before you could walk? Try Courchevel for sheer black runs and legendary off-piste routes.

This makes it a great area for eager kids looking to learn, and the broad selection of ski school options more than takes care of that.



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We're staying in what might be considered Méribel's less-attractive sister: Mottaret (or "Méribel-Mottaret" to use its full name). I would argue this is unfair, but I might be biased. I would also argue that it should be the top choice out of all seven resorts found within Les Trois Vallées. Why?

While Courchevel has all the glitz and glamour, and Val Thorens delivers high altitude, Mottaret sits slap-bang in the middle of the entire ski network, making it by far the best-connected. What's more, its position at 1,750m above Méribel makes it the highest resort in the Méribel Valley, so snow here is pretty reliable.

Our trip is during the opening week of the season and even then, while many resorts might be nervously awaiting the first proper 'dump' of snow, we luck out with gloriously powder and all-round ideal conditions after heavy snow on the first day, followed by five days of blissful sunshine.

A handful of trusty bars, cafés, and restaurants (don't miss Le Rastro, kids' eyes will be on stalks at the sheer size of their pizzas), traditional shops and boutiques, plus a popular nightclub if the mood takes you, means Mottaret ticks almost every box. As for prices? Nowhere in the Alps could claim to be inexpensive, but, if everything is relative, this is certainly one of Mottaret's biggest draws: it's significantly less pricey than many of its swish neighbours.

Our accommodation is operated by French ski specialists **Ski France** and, sitting in the heart of Mottaret village, is aptly called Hotel Le Mottaret.

The hotel is in prime position, with easy ski-in-ski-out directly onto a nursery slope which leads down to the main centre. Here you'll find a great selection of lifts that sweep you over to the valleys of Les Menuires, Courchevel, Saint Martin De Belleville and the rest.

Alternatively, take the exquisitely pretty green run 'La Truite' directly down into Méribel centre. It's a winner of a run for every level of skier, and passes alongside snow-dusted fir trees and mountain streams.

Also, getting kitted out with ski gear couldn't be easier from the hotel as it's quite literally next door to the ski rental shop. No clunking around with children's skis required.

Inside, the hotel has mastered the art of creating a cosy, relaxed atmosphere while maintaining high standards and great service.

Nothing is too much trouble and, although it's a three-star it could easily pass for a four, if not five. Unsurprisingly it's a hit with families, who account for one in three bookings here.

The spacious lounge area with its crackling fire adjoins the reception, making for a great spot to catch up post-ski over a hot chocolate or else for a tippie before dinner. We spend many jolly evenings here working our way through the hotel's collection of games.

I get chatting to one British couple who are enjoying their sixth stay here, with a seventh booked in for February with their children. "It has everything we could ever need...the kids absolutely love it and being all-inclusive just makes it all so easy." More of which later.

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Skiing in December is chilly and temperatures regularly hover around the -10°C mark, making the hotel's tea spreads at the end of each ski day a welcome sight. There are no claims to sophistication or finesse, but it's just what's needed after a long day on the mountains.

This, combined with a trip to the spa, makes afternoons in Hotel Le Mottaret nothing short of a treat. Well-worked muscles quickly feel revived with a stint in the hammam and sauna. We also enjoyed a routine of gathering in the roomy hot tub to share tales of the day.

When my (self-inflicted) diet of cheese, cheese and more cheese feels as though it may be catching up on me, a few lengths in the generous spa pool helped work up a fresh appetite in no time.

An outdoor hot tub is also available if you're feeling brave enough and is open to all hotel guests up until 6pm, from which point onwards it is available for private slots.

The hotel features 77 rooms, including four different family room categories. But whatever you go for, you can expect bright, fresh design with plenty of space, extremely comfy beds, and balconies overlooking panoramic views across Méribel Valley or towering Mont Vallon.

At the top end, the Family Suite comes with a full lounge area, two bathrooms, two bedrooms and sleeps up to six, while entry-level family rooms with one double bed and bunks, sleep four.

Hotel Le Mottaret offers you the choice of bed and breakfast, half board, full board or all-inclusive. We went for full board and ate like kings.

Evening buffets cater to all tastes (another big plus if you've got fussy kids in tow) and each night has a different theme. The traditional French night is a particular highlight, where a French onion soup had us cooing in appreciation.

Breakfast is a similar choice-rich affair with a charcuterie station next to a comprehensive pastry selection, and chefs whipping up fresh waffles and eggs.

As for lunch, you might, as I was, be inclined to think this is an unnecessary inclusion at your hotel: you'll be out on the slopes and not wanting to be constrained by returning to base in the middle of the day.

But this is where Hotel Le Mottaret's location really shines, as it's right in the middle of the whole ski area so extremely easy to get to, wherever you are.

Lunch is hearty fare like burgers, chips and platters of sausages on the menu, welcomed by hungry youngsters and parents alike. And it's served in the hotel's charming dining room, complete with carved-out wooden hearts and gingham curtains for a rustic, alpine feel.

When the weather's good and peak season is underway, an outdoor terrace adjacent to the dining room becomes a hub for eating, drinking, and soaking up the sun.



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There are lots of opportunities for family fun off the slopes at Méribel-Mottaret too.

A new swimming and leisure complex named Aquamotion features indoor and outdoor swimming pools, rapids, slides and an indoor surf pool, all free with a two-day or more Trois Vallées ski pass. Plus, you'll find a bowling alley and ice rink here too, just in case the 600km of fantastic pistes don't keep you busy enough.

Direct UK flights to Geneva from 1 hour, 15 minutes

Transfer from Geneva to Méribel from 2 hours

Hôtel Le Mottaret, 7-nights, half-board (2 adults, 2 children) from £1,400 per night, including free child places

A free shuttle service operates between Méribel and Mottaret in the evenings

Six-day Méribel Valley ski pass for 2024/25 (inclusive of Mottaret) from £276 per adult, £203 per child

Six-day Three Valleys ski pass for 2024/25 from £327 per adult, £267 per child.

Ski-France has everything you need to plan this Méribel-Mottaret ski holiday

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