

Pearl-wearing Sloane Rangers may have moved on but the smart set is still drawn to the luxury French ski resort and its jaw-dropping views

By Sarah Hartley

TRAVEL EDITOR

THEY say Chalet Inoko is the highest in Val d'Isère, and the views from its wraparound glass walls certainly suggest so. The glacier-capped mountains opposite, the charming scene of wooden houses, swirls of smoke peeping up from stripes of snow and pine.

Step outside to the wooden terrace and from the hot tub you can take in the peaks.

Chalet Inoko hosts barristers, bankers and expats who crave crystal-cold ice and snow. A lead guest will often treat 14 family members and friends – and you can see why.

Inside is a picture of cosy luxury, with warm cedar cladding the walls, and heated floors. A barn-sized living space is furnished with style – lights hang from the ceiling like sculpted clouds and a ginormous Vivienne Westwood life-sized fashion photograph looks over the dining space.

There are sofas for lounging and books for browsing, plus a courtyard bar rammed with champagne. Flowers grace every room, slippers are laid out for each guest and rugs drape over chairs next to the fire pit.

When you see the ribbed-knit headboards and lampshades in the bedrooms, plus fluffy skins on the loungers in the spa, it's no surprise to discover that the design-conscious owners are a young French couple.

For anyone who likes to swim, the lure of the indoor pool will see you leap out of bed first thing and head back again after a day on the slopes. Throw in the sauna and ceiling-to-floor views of the mountains from the pool or loungers, and you will bank memories without trying.

It's also pure joy to drink the crystal-clear water that flows straight from the tap, while bathing in it truly softens the skin.

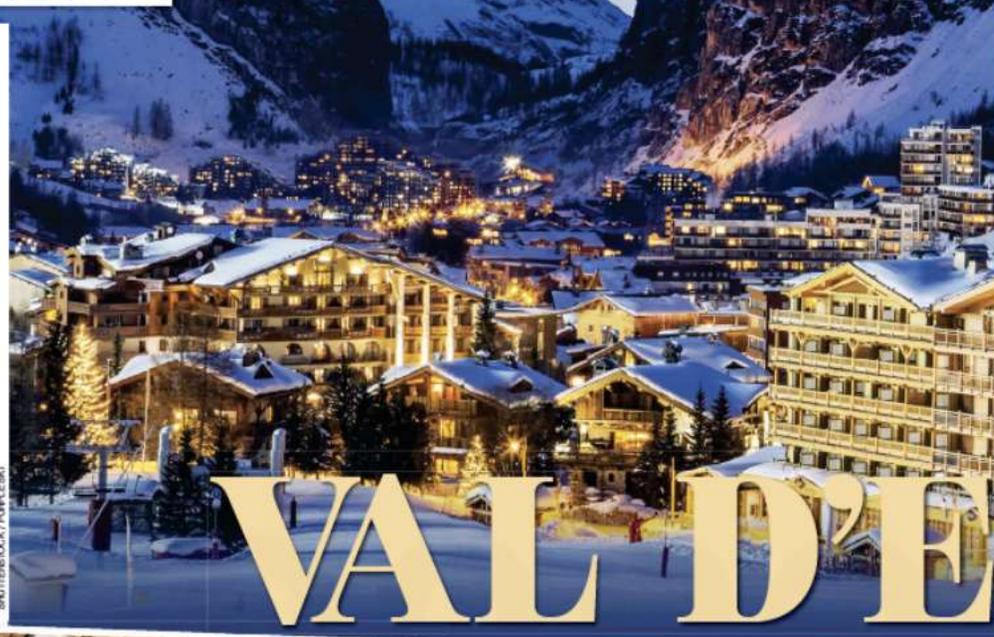
There are six bedrooms to choose from – two open out into family suites and one has bunk beds. The master suite is snug, though we do envy our daughter's wraparound balcony.

BREAKFAST is a daily fanfare of fruit, charcuterie, juices, smoothies, pastries and a hot choice – one day pancakes, another scrambled eggs – and is served on the long wooden table that becomes candlelit in the evening for the delights offered by our charming young French chef, Hugo Attou.

He is one to watch, having previously worked in Michelin-starred kitchens, so each of his creations is a veritable gastronomic treat.

Standout dishes – aside from his handmade sushi – include agnolotti filled with truffle and squid ink, served with parmesan, chive and garlic, or the slow-roast chicken with creamed potato and Jerusalem artichoke.

The nightly ritual of canapés followed by a four-course dinner



VAL D'ISÈRE



AS BIG AS A BARN: Inoko's lounge, and a bedroom, top left. Right: One of chef Hugo's exquisite dishes

is enough to swell your salopettes, but also ensures you ski that bit harder the next day. And all that food comes after freshly baked afternoon cake to enjoy with tea.

We ask our chef if he gets any requests. Only once, apparently, for apple crumble.

Guests arrive from Lyon or Geneva and can expect a three-hour journey to the resort.

In our case, we are picked up at Geneva, but as Swiss law forbids drinking in vehicles we are not allowed to pop the Veuve Clicquot

champagne in the hamper that Hugo has packed for us until we pass the border.

Once open, it is washed down with delicious cheese and ham sandwiches and chocolate brownies.

It is February but twinkling fairy lights across Val d'Isère give the pretty town a Christmassy feel. A steep, snow-banked road ascends to the magnificent three-storey house, flanked by pine

trees above 'Petit Alaska', as the area is known. Chalet Inoko is would rather spend more to guarantee a less hectic experience, then Chalet Inoko makes perfect sense – especially if you want every member of the family to have a stress-free holiday.

Everything is made as simple as possible so all that guests need to do is relax. You are delivered by chauffeured minibuses in four minutes to the slopes – and the duty driver is waiting to retrieve you when you're finished.

VAL D'ISÈRE is not cheap, so we make it memorable. A margarita pizza lunch at Gigi, halfway up the Solaise mountain, with coffee and water costs €40. But we relax in deck chairs, faces turned to the sun, listening to the swish of skis on the slopes ahead. This is the life.

Who skis in the resort now? Not the Sloane Rangers of my youth who sank Steiners and wore bandanas, the girls all pink marble lipstick and pearls. Rising costs have made the resort more international and less Anglo-centric than before lockdown, when Britons outnumbered the indigenous French.

In many ways, Val d'Isère has become a more sophisticated version of its former self.

On chef's night off we settle on the Fondue Factory, an institution

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in town and far more glamorous than it sounds. There's an open kitchen, great wine list and buzzing tables with plenty of space between. The fondue is morish whether you want to go heavy on the cheeses or meat, or both.

Take time to explore the well-heeled town. A tiny jewel is the church, built on the site of an 11th Century chapel, with flickering lanterns, candles and shrines bearing the faded photographs of bright young faces full of hope

who were lost to the mountains. It is a searing reminder of how snow and ice must be as respected.

One sunny afternoon, from the comfort of the decked terraces of the Yule Hotel, at the base of the slopes, we join other Aperol-fuelled apres-skiers to watch experts as they slalom down Le Face – Val d'Isère's iconic black run. I wonder at such ability.

The next morning, my heart is in my mouth as my young daughter impressively schusses down

hard green and then soft blue runs, her pink snowsuit juddering as she vanishes down the slope.

The benefits of ski school are evident and well worth the investment.

Perhaps you can't teach an old dog new tricks, as green runs remain my comfort zone. But on the last run on the last day, film me. I say.

When it is played back, though I had felt like I was zooming on the very edge of danger, weaving with a speed that caught my breath, it turns out that the white snowsuited figure is going no faster than a bag of flour on a supermarket conveyor belt. There's always next year...

For more information on a stay at Chalet Inoko, visit purleski.com.



FEAST FOR THE EYES: Lunch at Gigi on Solaise mountain. Top: Val d'Isère