

COUNTRY LIFE[®] TRAVEL

Time for a change



WINTER 2018/19



The triple Whammy

COUNTRY LIFE's guide to Les 3 Vallées, the world's greatest skiing area

Val Thorens

Hôtel Le Fitz Roy

In the heart of Val Thorens lies the intimate Hôtel Le Fitz Roy. A favoured destination for hard-core alpinists searching for understated luxury, its 58 rooms merge traditional French chalet décor with contemporary mid-century design. The result is a familiar, homely atmosphere, one suited to both the adventurous and the casual skier alike. Its location on Rond Point des Pistes means that you can ski in and ski out and you're also in a prime spot for some *apres ski*.

For supper, the restaurant offers traditional French cuisine, using seasonal produce, all of which is sourced from local farmers—the venison, in particular, is sublime. There's also an indoor pool, a full spa service and a private ski shop, where experts can advise on the best off-piste skiing that Les 3 Vallées has to offer.

Hugh Francis Anderson
Rooms from €270 per night (00 33 4 79 00 04 78; www.hotelfitzroy.com)

Making tracks

Le Fitz Roy can arrange for you to ski with Aurelien Durcroz, hotel ambassador and two-time Freeride World Tour Champion.

The Les 3 Vallées lift-pass covers 600km (370 miles) of groomed *piste*, but it's the immense range of off-piste terrain that draws guests back. As M. Ducroz (*above*) is a local and one who's won the toughest back-country ski competition in the world—twice—you'll be in safe hands.

Highlights include descending into Meribel down the western face (Jump

on the TDS Des Promiers lift, one minute from Le Fitz Roy) and the descent from Col de la Chavière, which also boasts sensational views over the

Chavière Glacier and Vanoise national park at the top of the Mortaret valley, where there's a frozen lake and a crochier path and sunny café for cross-country skiers and walkers.

Still not satisfied? The Glacier de Gébroutaz is accessible in a single day by ski-touring. If conditions are right, you'll be treated to virgin snow and undisturbed powder. *HZA*

Flying high

● Val Thorens, the highest of the three resorts at 2,300m (7,546ft) at its peak, is home to Europe's highest zipline, which links two peaks over the Val Thorens and Orelle valleys. Riders can hit speeds of more than 62mph as they fly 820ft above the snow. Located at the top of the Bouchet chairlift, in Orelle, skis and boards are strapped to your back so that you can continue your journey from the finish point at the resort peak.

● A new line will open in Val Thorens this season, carrying up to two passengers at a time (including pedestrians) back into the middle of the resort. *RP*

Meribel

Taiga Lodge, Dou du Pont

Like the middle child, the middle valley, Meribel, wants to be different—chalets dominate in a resort that's long been hugely popular with the British.

Chalet Taiga is a perfect example of the now-upmarket properties scattered across the resort. Surrounded by silver-birch trees, it has an easy-to-use shuttle-bus service. Charming divers, who are more than happy to carry your skis, will ferry you to and from the slopes or, if you're feeling very adventurous, you can ski home (warning: it's off-piste and you'll have to navigate your way back through the trees).

Design is cosy and intimate, and there's a sauna, a hot tub with forest views, open fires and a cinema to help you recover. Nothing was too much trouble for hosts Sophie and Charlie; the food they produced was some of the best chalet fare I've ever eaten, a long way from the bargain spag bog of the past. Supper was rendered even more enjoyable thanks to my fellow guests: we all came to enjoy getting together at the end of the day and swapping stories from the slopes. *My VIP SKI offers seven nights from £1,129 per person, based on two sharing, including cooked breakfast, afternoon tea and three-course evening meal on six nights, return flights from London Gatwick, transfers and VIP SKI's dedicated chalet service (020-8875 1957; www.vip-chalets.com)*

Life-changing lessons

Maison Sport, a company offering instruction and guiding in resorts across France, Switzerland and Italy, is the brainchild of three ski-team athletes. I spent a day with Oly Robinson, one of the founders, who improved my technique more in a morning than anyone else had done in the past five years. Practically a local, Mr Robinson also had great restaurant recommendations and insider knowledge. For more information, visit www.maisonsport.com/MIH

What's new for 2018/19

- This winter, two brand-new, high-speed chairlifts will open in the resort, each seating up to six skiers. One replaces the Chêrenne button, transporting 2,824 skiers to the top in only four minutes. The second, with heated seats and a pull-down shield, replaces the Plan de l'Homme and Roc de Fer lifts.
- Meribel's toboggan run will have longer opening hours, to seven days a week, allowing more riders to enjoy the just-over-two-mile track and 1,542ft vertical drop.
- The French SlopeStyle Cup will take place in the Mortaret DC Area 43 ski park, from January 24 to January 27. Take a slope-side seat to watch riders tackle specially built jumps several stories high and navigate rails and other obstacles.

Eric Gachet; Neil Emmerson/Robert Harding



The upmarket chalets of Meribel dominate the resort, the nucleus of the Les 3 Vallées area, which offers pretty forest skiing

Take only memories, leave only footprints

Plastic bottles, endless clean towels, short-haul flights: we don't need them. Hugh Francis Anderson reflects on the growing need for a greener travel industry

I'M often told that travel writing is the dream job, one that I'm lucky to have. However, I'm also aware that it must be one of the least eco-friendly vocations I could have set out to pursue. The very nature of my job requires me to board an inordinate number of planes; this year alone, I've taken more than 30 flights in search of stories across the globe. If my carbon footprint could talk, it wouldn't be saying anything good.

At a time when global consciousness surrounding sustainability has reached commendable heights, my guilt is somewhat alleviated by the rising interest in eco-friendly travel. I've long held the opinion that mass change comes when consumers call for action—and that's exactly what seems to be happening. Hotels, tour operators and airlines surely can't help but listen.

However, in hotels across the globe that aim to provide guests with a heavy dose of sustainable luxury—no mandatory laundry service, the removal of single-use plastics, locally sourced, seasonal menus and even eco-activities on offer—I'm often left wondering how green their credentials actually are. At present, sustainability within the luxury travel industry is unregulated.

Our thirst for wanderlust shows no sign of slowing down: according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the number of people crossing international borders every year, has grown from 25 million to 1.2 billion since 1950. That's a sixth of the population and a 49-fold increase and there's no way that those numbers aren't having a fundamental impact on the globe.

Tourism is big business. It accounts for one in 10 jobs across the world and generates more than £2.5 billion every day. That money is often vital to both local and national economies. To travel or not to travel; planet versus people.

In response, the UNWTO has established its own definition of sustainable tourism, one that 'takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities'. It offers little in the way of guidance—in fact, it just sounds quite tiring.

Hotels themselves have responded by taking to social media to broadcast their eco-friendly manifestos and garner support from the celebrities and influencers who crop up time and time again on our newsfeeds and on the pages of our newspapers and magazines. Some have openly invested in green resorts.

When beginning to put pen to paper for this article, I was swimming in a beautiful pool, in an incredibly remote part of the world. The hotel it belonged to boasted about many of the above initiatives: locally sourced food, little to no plastic and minimal use of electricity. There was, however, a series of fountains that I realised, over the coming days, ran 24 hours a day. They were mesmerising, but would I have missed them if they weren't there? Would I be happy to sacrifice them for some kind of green greater good?

To not travel is not the answer—after all, Hans Christian Andersen once wisely said that 'to travel is to live'. Change is needed, however, and it's the consumer who has the power to change how we travel for the better, whether that's using word of mouth, social media or direct interaction with the industry. The more of us who call for sustainable alternatives, the more the hotels, resorts and groups will be forced to listen.

How to go green

- Calculate your carbon footprint—WWF's online calculator (<https://footprint.wwf.org.uk>) takes minutes to use and it'll give you handy tips on how to reduce your environmental impact. Alternatively, Carbon Fund (<https://carbonfund.org>) gives you the opportunity to offset your emissions by donating to projects across the globe
- Travel with a reusable water bottle and refuse bottled water and plastic straws wherever possible. Jumeirah Vittaveli in the Maldives converts sea-

water into fresh drinking water. It's served in recycled glass bottles, which means it saves roughly 50,000 plastic bottles a year

- Try to avoid regular, short-haul flights (anything under 500km (310 miles)). If you can, drive. Alternatively, choose airlines with higher occupancy rates and newer models of efficient aircraft
- Do your research before you book and don't be afraid to question hotels and companies. A growing number of properties are installing effective waste-management systems and solar-energy or hydroelectric power sources