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JEP READER HOLIDAYS

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Free flights from Jersey
This ship will appeal to families with a huge range of activities for all the family, including an excellent kids' club, bowling lanes, basketball, hockey, football, climbing wall, abseiling, climbing cage, disco, karaoke, Playstation and Nintendo Wii zone
It also has excellent facilities for adults and families to enjoy together.
Contact Travelmaker on 784300

Julien Morel *lives the high life in the Three Valleys area of France as a guest of Consensio, a chalet operator with strong links to the Channel Islands*

Julien Morel (top left) spent three days in the Three Valleys in mid-December and stayed in Chalet Aurore (left), a property run by Consensio

AT certain times in life, if you don't reside in the world of the wealthy, it is worth experiencing it, even if you feel a little decadent doing so – taking that business-class flight, going to that Michelin-starred restaurant, staying in that plush hotel or chalet.

And what better place to dip your toe into luxury than in the mountains?

Most of us only go skiing for one week a year, so it is imperative that it is special. Why spend a glorious day on pristine piates only to return to an average room with average service where the cheese fondue is as lumpy as the pillows?

Although we live in tough times, it seems that a lot of us are still keen to splash out on a quality holiday. This isn't anecdotal. Ask Ceri Tinley, a 32-year-old former Islander who is married to Jerseyman Simon.

Ceri, who lives close to the Three Valleys village of St Martin de Belleville with Simon, their three-year-old son Mattieu and collie Jessica is co-founder and managing director of Consensio, a company that is building a name for itself at the upper end of the ski chalet market.

Consensio was founded two years ago by Ceri and Stuart Pinnell, a former chief of Guernsey's tourist board. This Channel Islands duo responded to the collapse of Descent, a well-known top-end chalet operator which didn't survive the recession. Consensio offered the potentially out-of-pocket chalet owners an attractive profit-share agreement and many came on board, creating a portfolio of four luxurious properties in Méribel, two over the mountain in Courchevel 1850 and three in Val d'Isère.

And for the sun-seeker they even have a number of villas in St Tropez and Antibes.

Chalet life

I was invited by Consensio to sample life in one of their chalets. Chalet Aurore is close to two other Consensio chalets, a two-minute drive from the Méribel bowl in an exclusive enclave that includes Michael Schumacher among its residents.

But before I move on to the finer details of its salubrious facilities, let's get one thing clear: you can have all the Perrier-Jouët you can drink, you can have Jo Malone gels and shampoos in the bathroom, you can have heated stands for your ski boots, you can have the hot-tub and the swimming pool and the cinema room and pool table (and you get all of the above at Chalet Aurore), but the experience is nothing without a high quality of service.

And Ceri has worked hard on that, building an enthusiastic team who are all qualified in hospitality, whether as a chef or hotel manager.

I was picked up at Geneva Airport after a smooth and on-time direct flight with Blue Islands (once you've flown direct, you'll never want to transit through the UK again) and was driven in a smart VW van to the resort.

Upon arrival at the chalet, cake, quiche and canapés were waiting, accompanied by a glass of the aforementioned champagne. Ski equipment and pass were efficiently dealt with (with no need to leave the building) and I was ready to be reunited with my bags in my room.

Unpacking and packing was about the most arduous activity I had to perform in my two days at Aurore. The food and wine were excellent (and I could choose both – no set menus or vinegary plonk in this chalet), we were dropped off and picked from the lifts with ease without even the need to carry poles and skis, the fire was roaring in the evening – which is very important after a day on the slopes – and there was even a masseur and beautician on hand to pamper and prepare your aching muscles for the next day.

It was all effortless, which made the actual skiing all the more enjoyable. And, boy, was the skiing good.

Powder snow in pristine conditions – what could be better?

Three Valleys

Anyone who has ever skied has heard of the Three Valleys, which claims to be the world's largest ski area.

And it is massive – you needn't do the same run twice over the course of a fortnight, such is its size. Courchevel 1550, 1850 or 1850, La Praz, La Tania, Moriaret, Val Thorens, Les Menuires … the list of resorts you can head to or base yourself in goes on and on.

Méribel is definitely the most British (it was actually founded by a Englishman in the 1930s) and everyone in the resort speaks English. In fact, the chances are that they are English.

It certainly isn't the cheapest resort (a burger and beer will set you back 15-20 euros) but it is fun, friendly and well-organised.

And what about the snow? For the last few years there has been plenty of snow and this season appears to be no different. I went in mid-December and there was plenty. Indeed, on day two of three, I was skiing in knee-high powder on piste.

Yes, the snow was coming down in buckets and visibility was negligible, but it was exciting stuff. And for my other two days, it was clear blue skies and beautifully manicured runs – perfect conditions.

But if you're a beginner or want to head off piste, fear not, because Consensio has forged a partnership with private coaching firm Elite Ski Team, which is made up of some of the most experienced instructors in the Alps.

The indoor pool of Chalet Shemshak (left), which has stunning views over the Alps, and above, a spot of après-ski refreshment

Chalet Shemshak

I was fortunate to be a guest of Consensio when it launched the latest addition to its portfolio, Chalet Shemshak, in the glamorous Courchevel 1850. Chalet Aurore was beautiful, but if you really want to push the boat out, Shemshak is the place for you.

Able to sleep up to 12 guests in five sumptuous en-suite bedrooms, Shemshak includes its own indoor swimming pool, jacuzzi, sauna, hammam and gym.

If all that sounds a bit on the energetic side, the floors are connected by a lift so you can save energy on the stairs.

I make no bones about it, Shemshak is at the top end of the top-end market, but do consider it if that bonus has been particularly good this year.

Home from home

For dedicated skiers, getting your own place in the Alps can make long-term sense and Simon Tinley, Ceri's husband and Old Victorian, runs his own property consultancy business.

He can help to find, buy or renovate any property wherever a client wants, whether that is in Europe or further afield.

Contact: www.simontinley.co.uk.

A SIX-DAY high-season lift pass for the whole Three Valleys area costs 235 euros (£195) for those aged 13 to 64, 177 euros (£146) for children and 200 euros (£165) for senior citizens. Discounted family passes, late-season passes and ones that limit you to particular valleys are also available. You can buy the highly recommended Carré Neige insurance (which covers you if you need to be taken off the mountain) when you buy your ski pass.

THE DETAILS

Julien Morel flew direct to and from Geneva as a guest of Blue Islands. One-way fares start at £99 per person. Flight time: 1 hr 50 min. Transfer time to Méribel: 2 hr 15 min. **Contact: www.blueislands.com**

- Julien stayed at Chalet Aurore, which can cater for ten guests. A week's stay ranges from £10,500 to £36,500 depending on the time of year. A week's stay at Chalet Shemshak costs from £17,500 to £79,500

For your money you will get:

- Exclusive use of the chalet and its facilities.
- Champagne reception.
- Dedicated service.
- Tea or coffee in bed, breakfast and afternoon tea daily.
- Children's lunch and supper every day.
- Champagne and canapés daily.
- Dinners for six nights.
- An open spirit bar and a range of soft drinks.
- Luxury bath products.
- Fresh flowers and daily newspapers.
- In-resort chauffeured vehicles.

Contact: www.consensioholidays.co.uk

Consensio founder and managing director Ceri Tinley, with husband Simon and three-year-old Mattieu

Next week: Richard Heath soaks up some winter sun in the premier Egyptian resort of El Gouna