

From dorms to deluxe suites, there's a chalet to suit all, says MARK PALMER

THE French just don't get chalet holidays — while the Germans, Italians and Dutch wouldn't dream of using the two words in the same sentence. And who can blame them? After all, it's a bit odd, sharing accommodation with strangers. Chalet holidays are a very British institution: despite being the private, seemingly reserved people we are, when it comes to skiing, we love mucking in for a communal experience.

And that experience has come a long way since Colin Murison Small pioneered the concept of chalet holidays in the Swiss resort of Grindelwald in 1959. In those days, his 'Muribirds' — as the chalet girls were known — used to rustle up spaghetti, plonk a bottle of acidic red wine on the table and spray air freshener in the communal bathroom.

Today, many chalets have en-suite bathrooms, in-house spas and cinemas, gourmet dinners, private creches and an endless supply of fine wines. Others offer you little more than a roof over your head. Take your pick — there's something for everyone.

LUXURY

CHALET FERME DE MOUDON

Where is it? Les Gets, Portes du Soleil, about an hour from Geneva. The resort of Les Gets gives you access to the vast Portes du Soleil ski domain with its 14 Alpine villages and miles of pistes straddling France and Switzerland. While the snow might be slow to fall so far, the region has a state-of-the-art back-up snow-making system.

And the chalet? Once a 17th century farmhouse; now a beautiful designer chalet that sleeps ten. Age-old timbers blend with the swanky furnishings and labels. Luxury toys include a sauna, massage room and outdoor hot tub, with five staff on tap to see to your every need. A fleet of chauffeur driven cars will whisk you in and out of town. Relax every night with champagne and canapés before a five-course dinner.

How much? From £14,465 to £26,825 a week for the whole chalet, excluding travel (Descent International: 020 7384 3854; descent.co.uk)

CHALET ADLER

Where is it? St Anton, Austria. The resort isn't ideal for beginners but intermediates and experts will have a blast. The lift pass covers Zurs and Lecht, the resort much loved by Princess Diana. An amazing lift has been installed this season: gondolas begin and end the journey on a ferris wheel. At night, St Anton wakes up, with Kandahar, one of the hottest — and loudest — night-clubs in town. Once the snow arrives, it tends to linger until the end of April.

And the chalet? Five vast bedrooms, some covering more than 35sq m, feature stunning hand-painted Italian tiles in the bathrooms. There are polished floors and every room has a flat-screen TV and Linn sound system. Kick back in the in-house spa, with open-air hot tubs on the roof overlooking St Anton, and benefit from a chauffeur service to the main lift station in the morning. The staff live out and it's new this season.

How much? From £695 to £1,955 per week, including flights and transfers (Scott Dunn Ski: 020 8682 5050; scottdunn.com)

CHALET SASKIA

Where is it? Vaujany, France. Take one huge cable car out of the resort and suddenly you have access to Alp d'Huez, one of the great ski areas of Europe.

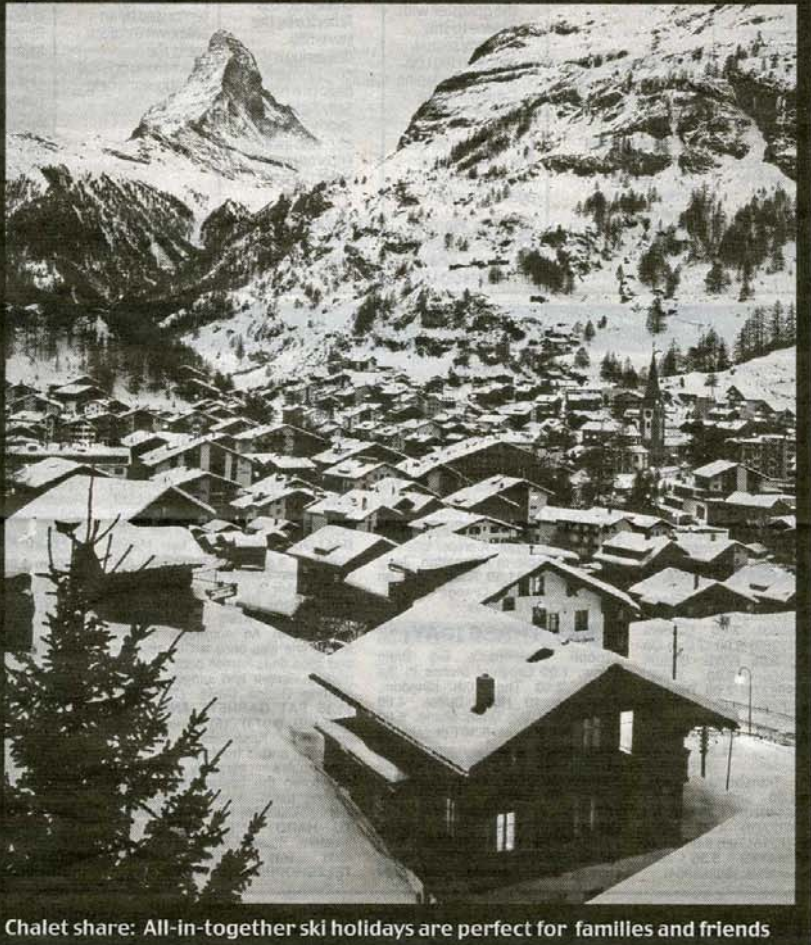
It's high, which means snow-cover is reliable. There's plenty of off-piste for the intrepid and several excellent gourmet restaurants on the slopes. Alp d'Huez is not pretty — which is why you stay in Vaujany.

And the chalet? This culinary hotspot offers some of the best food in the Alps, mainly because the chef is Marcus Cull, a Kiwi who keeps turning down offers to run Michelin star restaurants.

There's a glass-fronted kitchen so you can watch the master at work, but Vaujany is a sleepy village so don't expect to dance until dawn.

How much? From £695 per week, including flights and transfers (Ski Peak: 01428 608 070; skippeak.com)

Chalet chic 2007



Chalet share: All-in-together ski holidays are perfect for families and friends



BUDGET

CHALET ROSA

Where is it? Lauterbrunnen, near Murren, Switzerland. The ski pass includes Wengen, Murren, Grindelwald and First, so you won't run out of terrain. Murren is an idyllic car-free mountain village, which is one big pleasure dome for strong intermediates and powder hound experts. And for a small village, the nightlife is spectacular. Check out the Tachi bar in the Hotel Eiger and then move on to Inferno disco.

And the chalet? Brand new this year, it sleeps 24-28 people and features four family rooms. Open log fires provide the atmosphere and there's an outdoor hot tub, a huge living room and a separate dining room. It's a five-minute walk to the slopes and you benefit from free ski guides for five days. This company specialises in keeping standards high and prices low.

How much? From £402 per week (Ski Miquel: 01457 821200; miquel-hols.co.uk)

CHALET WEGSCHEIDER

Where is it? Mayrhofen, Austria. Mayrhofen has its own glacier, guaranteeing snow — although the glacier is 12 miles away. It's a resort that manages to be both ideal for families and perfect for night owls looking for riotous apres-ski. Snowboarders flock here: they have their spectacular half-pipe and lots of advanced jumps.

And the chalet? Brilliant location in a huge area. Ski pass includes more than four neighbouring resorts and the chalet sleeps up to 18, with half of the rooms overlooking the mountain. Don't expect your own bathroom: there are two showers and four toilets. Perfect for the young crowd in search of a party atmosphere.

How much? From £589 per week, including flights, transfers, lift pass and ski/boot hire (Equity Ski: 01273 622111; equityski.co.uk)

THE BUNKER

Where is it? Verbier, Switzerland. You'll find some of the best off-piste terrain in the Alps in this resort made famous by the Duchess of York. Plenty of sunshine but it has a reputation for keeping its snow. Friday and Saturday nights will feel like you're back in Britain when the weekenders roll in. You're not an experienced skier until you have skied here.

And the chalet? You won't find anywhere cheaper than this. Not a chalet in the traditional sense — in fact, it's a former nuclear shelter that now has five dorms, each sleeping up to 36 people. Ideal for the ski hard, play hard fraternity. Verbier offers some of the best off-piste terrain in the Alps. Take your own sleeping bag and remember that while a big breakfast is provided, you won't get dinner.

How much? From £11 per night, B&B, excluding flights and transfers (The Bunker: 00 41 27 771 6602; thebunker.ch)

MID-RANGE

CHALET ELENA

Where is it? Les Crets, just outside Val d'Isere, France. The latter should be avoided if you feel uncomfortable with the sound of British voices. Teenagers can't get enough of the night-life, though, and the skiing is second to none. Linked to less attractive Tignes, where there's a glacier guaranteeing skiing all year round. 'Val' claims to have 'alpine charm'.

And the chalet? Occupies a commanding position on a small rise in the middle of the prestigious Les Crets enclave of Val d'Isere. The chalet has the feel of a venerable old farmstead thanks to the judicious use of local slate, stone and weathered wooden floors. There's a sauna in the basement and for those with young children, it's located next to

Marmot's Den, tour operator Snowline's resort creche and kids' club.

How much? From £669 per week, including flights and transfers (Snowline: 08701 123 118; snowline.co.uk)

CHALET CASTOR

Where is it? Paradiski (Les Arcs and La Plagne), France. The resort claims to be even bigger than Val d'Isere/Tignes and has one of the largest double-decker cable cars in the world (capacity for 400 people) linking the two resorts. Ideal for families and all abilities. Don't expect traditional alpine buildings, but what you lose on the architecture you gain on the slopes.

And the chalet? Breathtaking views over the valley towards Mont Blanc and you can ski in and out of the back door. There are five

en-suite bedrooms and a log fire.

How much? From £595 per week, including flights and transfers (Finlays: 01573 226 611; finlayski.com)

CHALET CROCUS

Where is it? France's Courchevel 1850, where the Beckhams and the Abramovitchs ski. It's bang in the middle of the vast Trois Vallées area, one of the most famous ski playgrounds in the world. You've got Meribel in the next valley and the hideous (but great skiing) Val Thorens in another.

And the chalet? It's a one-minute walk to the main lift station and is perfect for teenagers in search of night-life (buzzing Bar Atelier is opposite). Courchevel 1850 is one of the most expensive resorts in Europe, but Chalet Crocus need not break the bank. There's a roaring log fire and a nightly three-course dinner with wine included.

How much? From £576 per week, including flights and transfers (Inghams: 020 8780 8800; inghams.co.uk)

WEB WISDOM
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