

Family skiing on a budget: The lessons.

- Manage everyone's expectations.
  - Accept that you have to make compromises, such as a lack of full en-suite facilities.
  - Focus on value for money.
  - Accept that it might not suit everyone.
  - Fill the rooms with people you know: rooms at Chalet Chardons sleep up to six and you may be allocated room-mates if your room is not full.
  - Pay for ski hire and lift passes when the pound is at its strongest – if you can work out when that is.
- Chalet Chardons, Tignes Les Brevières, 73320 Tignes, France:  
chaletchardons.com  
Tel: +33 493 597 354.

our seven nights half board over the New Year week would be 360 euros per person – about £260 at the time – assuming maximum occupancy per room, with not all facilities en suite.

Suspicious of just how "basic" this basic accommodation was, I trawled for reviews on the internet, with inconclusive results – views ranged from ecstatic to scathing. It clearly depended on the expectations and attitude with which you travelled.

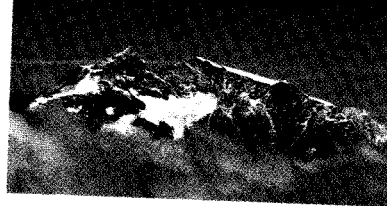
I stressed this in all subsequent planning meetings, and the group seemed happy to rough it if it meant we got to ski together.

Transport arrangements did divide the group, however, with two families opting for flights from Gatwick to Geneva and long coach transfers, and two families choosing the train from St Pancras to Bourg St Maurice, with a short bus or taxi ride to the resort.

There would have been little in it in terms of cost and time, but for easyJet's aircraft, which developed a technical fault and necessitated an overnight stay in Geneva on the way home for two families. My family chose the train – less than £200 each – and would not hesitate to do so again. With accommodation and transport totalling about £450, equipment hire likely to be about £60 a head with a Chalet Chardons discount, and lift passes (which we would buy on arrival) projected to be about £150 each, we would only be a few pounds above our budget.

That we ended up more than £60 per person over budget and were left wincing, at first, every time we bought coffee or lunch on the piste, was down to global economic events and a dramatic deterioration in the value of the pound.

But was it worth it? Absolutely – every penny. Even so, arriving at the Chalet Chardons, despite



our low expectations, was still rather a shock. A low, double-bed with foam mattress was being assembled alongside a set of bunk beds in my family's small room; maids were still cleaning in the early evening; every narrow corridor

seemed a stage for chaos.

By dinner, however, a new vision of the hotel emerged. Our evening meal – large dishes of simple, hot and tasty food – was ideal, and the complimentary wine perfectly drinkable. The hotel was full, which made eating at its long tables and benches slightly uncomfortable. But the atmosphere was glowing.

It quickly became clear that giving everyone a great time was far more important to Chalet Chardons than making sure its flimsy curtains hung properly or that every hinge had all its screws in place.

It also became clear that behind the seemingly casual approach was tight discipline. The hotel was surprisingly quiet, given that there was a small nightclub bar in the basement, next to the ski storage room; and a guest smoking incident in the early hours of one morning was dealt with quickly and sternly.

The skiing, of course, was wonderful. Tignes Les Brevières is an attractive old village in the bottom right-hand corner of the Espace Killy piste map, which gives it a peaceful character while being within easy reach of the central Tignes resorts by ski lift or bus. A day trip on skis to Val d'Isère and back is easily achievable, but each afternoon's

skiing requires planning to reach the runs home before the lifts close.

Our primary task, however, was to see in the New Year together, for which fancy dress was required. The eight adults and two boys in our group largely failed to impress at this, but the eight girls worked hard with black bin bags assorted litter and make-up, and spent the night dancing on tables in the Underground bar.

Result: eight very proud and happy parents. □



Cheap skiing: The more the merrier

## Ski freshtracks

Ski Freshtracks is running several holidays to Tignes and Val d'Isère including an 'Off Piste Progression' holiday to Tignes from 17-24 January and a 'Vertical in Val' holiday to Val d'Isère from March 21-28. Call 020 8410 2022 or go to [skifreshtracks.co.uk](http://skifreshtracks.co.uk) for details.



There's a Ski Club rep in Tignes and Val d'Isère from 12 Dec-17 April. Visit [skiclub.co.uk/rep](http://skiclub.co.uk/rep) for more information

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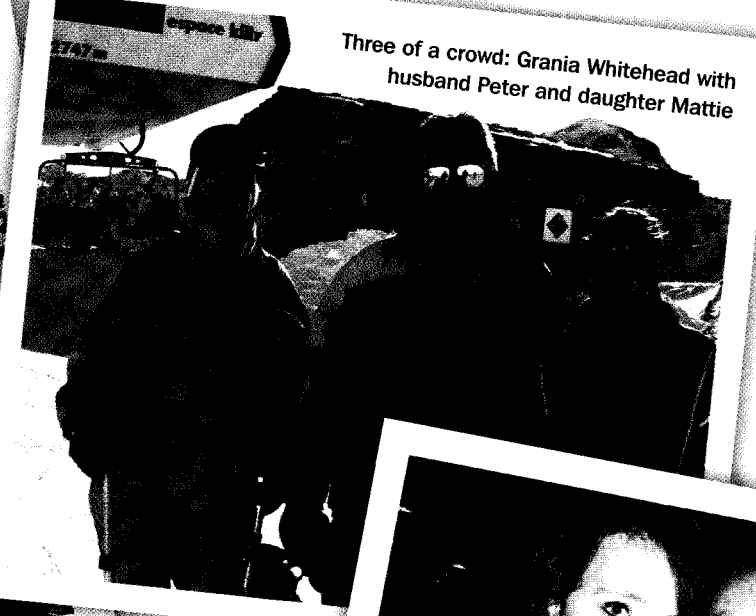
book online or call 0844 847 5003

\*£19 fare applies to selected off-peak sailings. High season supplements apply 17/12/09 - 04/01/10 and 31/03/10 - 18/04/10. Offer subject to availability. Telephone booking fee £5. Norfolkline terms and conditions apply.

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Tignes Les Brevières: Dam good value



Three of a crowd: Grania Whitehead with husband Peter and daughter Mattie



New Year fun: Daughter Meredith with friend Grace Thomson

# L'Espace Killy on the cheap

Economising is cool these days - not everyone who went skiing in Tignes and Val d'Isère last winter was pole-axed by high prices. When four families (mainly high-profile senior management types) found a cheap way of skiing there, they grabbed it with relish, as Grania Whitehead reports.

THOSE DARNED exchange rates. If it hadn't been for them we would have made it. The risks and sacrifices would have paid off. But no, the euro strengthened - or the pound weakened - it was all the same to us. Paying for coffees beside the piste, buying lunch, the cash just evaporated.

We still had a wonderful time, mind you. All 18 of us - four families. It's just that last winter's ski trip didn't quite fit within our tight budget of £650 a head, including transport, accommodation, lift passes and ski hire.

The challenge grew from a chance remark I made at a New Year's Eve dinner party the year before. I casually suggested to the friend next to me that we get together in a ski resort to see in the next New Year. I thought nothing more of it until one of the families rang to invite us to the first ski-trip planning meeting two months later.

The get-together was enjoyable enough: five couples (originally) chatting over dinner about where we might go, the fun we would have, whether a hotel or self-catering would suit us best, how we might travel.

But eventually the unmentionable subject of money intruded. We needed budgetary restraint, especially as the travel industry deems children to be adults roughly a decade before they are likely to earn a salary. Each of the families had moved on from "two adults plus children" to "four or five adults".

Out went any idea of skiing in Val d'Isère, Courchevel, Aspen or Klosters; in came brochures for Bulgaria. Enthusiasm waned, one family dropped out, and the project looked doomed.

To give it one last chance, I made a quick sweep of the internet - search words "skiing" and "cheap". And up popped the Chalet Chardons, in Tignes Les Brevières.

Within days, the four remaining families were back at the dinner table, poring over the details of Chalet Chardons' accommodation, working out who would fit where.

Chalet Chardons, owned and run by British ski and snowboard enthusiasts, consists of a main hotel with about 16 rooms sleeping up to 56 people, plus two chalets and further apartments. All are cheap: )))



Peter and Mattie Whitehead, with (left) Heather Lockwood

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