

Courchevel Ski Station – France
LIVING LA BELLE VIE DANS UNE CAGE DOREE
By *LESLIE WOIT*

Forget Botox. This French resort does for alpine glamour what Coco Chanel did for women. Courchevel makes it easy to look marvelous. Extravagant mountain living has never been so effortless. Slide elegantly from your door onto Aubusson-smooth slopes (the ski-in/ski-out treat is sadly less common in the Alps than across the pond). Lavish as many hours as you can spare exploring the magical 373-mile maze of Trois Vallées terrain, where the trails are as well groomed as the clients. But don't be late for your date: shopping, dining, spa-ing— this jet-set retreat has la belle vie stamped all over it.

Gateway to the largest ski area in the world, Courchevel is the glittering jewel of Les Trois Vallées. It's actually made of four distinct villages ascending skyward from the most affordable, Le Praz at 4,265 feet, followed by villages at 5,085 ft. and 5,413 ft. and on up to the high-rent district of Courchevel at 6,069 feet where life is pretty darn jammy.



Home-away-from home for a clientele that deserves its own moniker (someone recently came up with "Save the Rich" embossed polo shirts), one shouldn't be surprised to slurp oysters beside the Aga Khan at Le Chabichou, have a Royal boogie on the back tables of Le Tremplin with Prince William and Kate, or watch as a dour-faced Russian bodyguard sweeps your white truffle pasta for bugging devices at Pierre Gagnaire Pour Les Airelles.

This season, Hotel L'Apogée opens its pearly gates as the resort's 16th five-star address, making a total of 18 when you add the two, five-star "palace" hotels. That's no typo. This is the highest concentration of five-star hotels in any ski resort in the world, with eye-watering prices to match. Go ahead and weep if you want to. Someone will be there to hand you a high-thread count hankie and a flute of Dom to calm the frisson.

Crise, quelle crise? Stylish ways to flash cash pop like paparazzi bulbs. At the stunningly lovely Hôtel Le Strato, built by the distinguished Boix-Vives family (iconic owner of Rossignol for many years), the ski boot room beckons with the swanky Champagne bar. Bernard Arnault, doyen of the global luxury brand LVMH, cut his hotelier teeth here with Cheval Blanc, recently earning a "palace" designation and two Michelin stars. (Can't pull yourself away from your suite? Simply ring for "Hair Room Service"). For a chic powder-laden vibe, check into Le Manali with its rooms themed around the owners' favorite heli-ski haunts. For those who prefer more intimate digs, Shemshak Lodge, a luxurious five-bedroom catered chalet owned by a charming Iranian prince, features an indoor pool, an entire floor devoted to wellness, and unlimited Perrier-Jouët on tap. Shemshak is both handsome and rare: A new building in a space-starved resort where property commands 20,000 euros per square meter and, famously, London-based oligarch Roman Abramovich couldn't find any for sale for all the tea in China.



Between making Haute Savoie tracks and doing haute couture shopping (Hermes, Bulgari, Chanel—they're all here), Courchevelistes are busy bees. In December, the Ladies' World Cup provides a sportif air (remember this name: local boy Alexis Pinturault is tapped to be the next Ted Ligety). It's pukka chukka in January when the Snow Polo Tournaments kicks off at the highest polo pitch in the Alps. Another highlight of the many free (yet costly to stage) events is the spectacular International Festival of Pyrotechnic Art, which decorates night skies throughout February and March. And keep your eyes open by day: the natural beauty of the Haute Savoie gets dressed up with dozens of sculptures erected across villages and mountain tops for the annual outdoor art safari called Altitude Art. Largesse isn't just for grownups. At Easter, 10,000 chocolate eggs are scattered over the slopes.

Don't worry about finding your way round the Trois Vallées, a topographical smorgasbord that could blanket the five biggest American ski resorts combined (speaking of which, the new Vail Epic Pass includes free skiing in the Trois Vallées; so no excuses now). Courchevel has no fewer than 1,000 ESF (École du Ski Français) instructors using 11 languages. Because this is France and life couldn't be more beautiful. Of course, a little spritz of Botox never hurt either.

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