

Travel

No business like snow business

Snow's up dude



ABU DHABI TO GENEVA

Flight time: Approximately seven hours direct to Geneva
Time difference: Three hours behind the UAE
Dhs1 = 0.2 euros

Despite the warm weather in the UAE, many still enjoy a visit to colder climates to speed down the high-altitude slopes in Europe. *Scott Snowden* seized the chance to take a late season deal to the snow-covered French Alps

Regardless of whether you're an expert skier or just a beginner, the sensation of breathing in the fresh, freezing mountain air is invigorating, and speeding down the snow-covered slopes is exhilarating.

Two of the top ski resorts in Europe are Val d'Isère and Tignes in the French Alps, and are located practically next door to each other. So close in fact that many make their way across the slopes to enjoy the other resort's runs for a day.

Val d'Isère is situated at an altitude of 1,850 metres and has guaranteed snow from the end of November to May. The east and central areas are taken up by traditional chalets, while high-rise architecture dominates the landscape to the west of town.

Together with nearby Tignes, the villages form part of the l'Espace Killy, the self-titled 'most beautiful ski area in the world'. Opinion on this aside, the combined space is certainly the largest

ski area that you'll find.

Both resorts offer a range of accommodation, from premium hotels to cut-price chalets, but Val d'Isère is the more expensive of the two resorts. The top-end chalets here are stunning, with an authentic Alpine-style interior, full furnishings and open log fires – fitting for the celebrity guests who are rumoured to holiday in the area.

Most of these lavish living quarters will also offer full access to a sauna, Jacuzzi and indoor heated pool, so those aching muscles can relax after a hard day carving up the slopes.

If you are more constrained by budget – and the cost of ski holidays can soon add up – you could instead choose to share a chalet, rent one with a group of friends, stay in a hostel or perhaps opt for a self-catering chalet. So even if you don't earn as much as a rock star, more affordable accommodation is always available both in Val d'Isère and Tignes.



Chalet accommodation



Cafés dot the slopes

The nightlife, or après-ski, is plentiful. The term generally refers to going out and enjoying yourself after a hard day on the slopes. It's popular in the Alps where skiers and snowboarders often stop at bars on their last run of the day while still wearing all their ski gear – very similar in concept to the '19th hole' in golf.

There are a large number of restaurants and bars to visit, should you fancy an indulgent holiday or even just breaking away from the group for a night. These range from nightclubs and venues where live bands and DJs play, to smaller, quieter and more personal restaurants offering everything from traditional French and Italian cuisine to fast food.

In fact, if you opt for catered accommodation, where the meals are provided, you will have to go out for at least one night, because the staff will have a night off. And quite rightly so. It is always wise to reserve your table because many of the tour operators that organise the shared, catered chalets share the same night off, so the eating-out night can get very busy.

For first-rate à la carte menus in Val d'Isère, try La Table des Neiges in Hotel Tsanteleina (*Avenue Olympique*) or Le Grand Ourse (*Rue Noël Machet*) – both in the town centre – or the Auberge Saint Hubert (*Avenue des Jeux Olympiques*). La Savoyarde (*Rue Noël Machet*) provides a superb selection of local specialities, and for the best pizzas, pastas and fish dishes head for Le Samovar (*La Daille*) or Bar Jacques (*Rue du Coin*) in the centre of town.

There are plenty of restaurants in Tignes, some with very good reputations for quality. Le Caveau (*Place du Curling*) and Le Clin D'oeil (*Le Lac Rosset*), both in Val Claret, are two of the best. Most of the restaurants have set menus, so it's easy to keep the cost down. There are plenty of restaurants that fall into a lower budget category, but still deliver great food. Le Bouchon (*Route du Lavachet*) for example, has a fantastic five-course meal for around 25 euros (Dhs120) a head.

There are also plenty of sizeable and well-stocked supermarkets to shop at if you've decide to opt for self-catering. You can even leave perishable food outside on your balcony overnight if the fridge is a little full. Providing you've packed a little snow around it, the temperature outside will keep it fresh for a few days.

A shuttle bus regularly runs between the villages in the valley from about 8am to roughly 6pm, connecting Val d'Isère to Tignes. The bus costs in the region of Dhs120 and takes approximately 25 minutes.

Both resorts provide wide, well-groomed, popular piste slopes (often referred to as 'highway skiing') and backcountry (off-piste) runs. Val d'Isère offers slightly more of the latter and consequently could appeal to more experienced skiers and snowboarders. You may even find that some slopes are shown as easier than they actually are – a blue run may be closer to the difficulty level of a red, for example.



Tignes

Slopes at Val d'Isère



Top tumble tip

You will fall over. It's completely unavoidable. And as you get more confident, the more tricky the manoeuvres you'll try. So, a tumble or two is just part of the process. However, a bad fall can discourage you and more than likely you'll prefer to rest and perhaps try again the next day. But if you're only holidaying for a week, you'll also want as much time as possible on the slopes.

The solution is simple: do not be afraid to put on a little padding to begin with. Without a doubt, the most important is a helmet, regardless of whether you're skiing or snowboarding.

A few snowboarders might tell you a set of kneepads are also useful. However, what you probably won't be told is that a set of three big, yellow sponges – the type you use to wash your car with, taped together and firmly stuck down the back, inside your salopettes – will save you more pain and suffering that you can imagine. With a jacket on, it doesn't even show, for those concerned about their image. And when you drop on your derrière for the tenth time that morning, you'll wonder where it was again that you read this particular pearl of wisdom.

Need to know



GETTING THERE

Etihad flies direct to Geneva from Dhs4,090 return. Geneva has good bus/shuttle links to Val d'Isère and Tignes, which we recommend because finding the route in a hire car isn't particularly easy. www.etihadairways.com