



Village church, Samoëns, Haute-Savoie, France Photo: Alamy

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Comment (http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/snowandski/9148590/Ski-France-Samoëns.html#disqus_thread)

Could Samoëns be the near-perfect resort? My love affair with the big French resorts, Val d'Isère, the Trois Vallées, has begun to waiver: the cost of accommodation, the price of lunch on the mountain and the occasional grumpiness of the locals, overwhelmed by the seasonal invasion of Britons, are all off-putting. I have always been a little envious of those who have their pet resort but have never quite found mine. Until now.

Samoëns is a breath of fresh mountain air. The French proudly describe it as one of their monuments historiques, that just happens to be attached to a great ski area. An hour by car from Geneva, this ancient village, famed for its stonemasons, is part of the Grand Massif ski domain and is connected to high-altitude, snowsure Flaine. Consisting of five resorts – Flaine, Samoëns, Morillon, Sixt and Les Carroz. The Grand Massif offers 265km of piste; 80 per cent of the slopes are north facing, so hold the snow well, and the majority of the clientele is French.

The centre of Samoëns is traffic free, and has a beautiful square dominated by a magnificent lime tree. For the self-caterer, the main street is a delight, full of gourmet shops offering mountain ham, local cheese and mouth-watering pâtisserie. Every Wednesday there is a wonderful market selling local produce. There is also a handful of gorgeous Savoyard interior designer shops offering Alpine bric-a-brac: old skis, retro skiing photographs, antler lamps, "polar bear" skin rugs, and pretty china decorated with hearts. It's enough to make you want to buy a chalet on the spot.

And then there's the famous botanical garden, the only one of its kind in the Alps, created in 1906 and with more than 5,000 plants. Alas, when we were there it was hibernating under a thicket blanket of snow.

We rented a self-catering chalet we found on the internet. Sleeping 16, it had a hot tub, a sauna and even a private cinema and at £2,960 was a quarter of the price it would have been in one of the better-known French resorts.

[Late-season ski bargains \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/snowandski/9148413/Easter-skiing-deals-slope-off-while-the-sun-shines.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/snowandski/9148413/Easter-skiing-deals-slope-off-while-the-sun-shines.html)

Ski deals of the week (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/snowandski/8928696/Ski-deals-of-the-week.html>)

Is the season's best skiing yet to come? (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/travelnews/9132909/Easter-skiing-the-best-of-the-season-could-be-yet-to-come.html>)

Avalanche hits ski-lift in France

(<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/9123323/Skiers-in-Alps-have-lucky-escape-as-avalanche-hits-ski-lift.html>)

Allison Pearson: finding my ski legs (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/snowandski/9116430/Skiing-in-Switzerland-Allison-Pearson-learns-to-cross-country-ski-in-Pontresina.html>)

Beginners' skiing special (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/snowandski/9118214/Learning-to-ski-and-snowboard.html>)

Samoëns works well as a resort, though the one-way system tends to clog up at rush hour. The morning ski bus stops at 9.15am, so for the late starters it was a 20-minute walk to the telecabin, though we discovered we could leave our skis and boots in lockers at the top of the cable car. Peak-season queues looked worse than they were, and the longest we waited was 20 minutes at the Grand Massif Express telecabin. For those with cars a short cut can be taken by parking up at Samoëns 1600, with swifter access to the mountain.

The only drawback to the village is that you can't ski directly back to it (you take the telecabin down), though you can ski to the next village, Morillon, and catch the ski bus back to Samoëns, which takes 10 minutes.

The longest run is the 14km Les Cascades (blue) from Grandes Platières (2,480m) to Sixt via the lovely Lac de Gers refuge. For the beginner and intermediate the skiing is ideal, and there's more than enough to satisfy the expert, including the Gers bowl, with an 800m-drop of untracked skiing. The fickle weather kept us on our toes: sun, blizzard and rain, but despite the last, the piste held up well. Lunch was not only very welcome, in biting sleet, but a revelation: it was such good value that we sometimes struggled to spend more than €10 a head.

Samoëns enchanted us. At last, I think I've found my pet resort.

GETTING THERE

Easyjet (08712 882236; [easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com) (<http://www.easyjet.com>)) has flights to Geneva from £27 one way; British Airways (0844 493 0787; [ba.com](http://www.ba.com) (<http://www.ba.com>)) from £47; and Swiss (0845 601 0956;

[swiss.com](http://www.swiss.com) (<http://www.swiss.com>)) from £49. Holiday Autos (0871 472 5229; holidayautos.co.uk) offers seven days' car hire from £190. Various companies offer shared or private transfers, including Powder Cab (powdercab.com) from around £45 return and Mountain Drop-Offs (mountaindropoffs.com) from around £48 return.

PACKAGES

Erna low (0845 863 0525; [ernalow.co.uk](http://www.ernalow.co.uk) (<http://www.ernalow.co.uk>)) offers seven nights' self-catering at the four-star La Reine des Prés apartments from £167 per person, based on eight sharing, and at the three-star Les Fermes de Samoëns from £89, based on eight sharing, including Eurotunnel. J2ski (0033 141 129797; [J2ski.com](http://www.J2ski.com) (<http://www.J2ski.com>)) offers a week's half board at the three-star Hôtel Les Glaciers from £825, including flights.

RESORT COSTS

A six-day Grand Massif ski pass costs €210 (£174). A week's ski/boot hire is from €72 (£59) per person at Skiset ([skiset.com](http://www.skiset.com) (<http://www.skiset.com>)). There are three ski schools: Zig Zag Ski (0033 631 204410; [zigzagski.com](http://www.zigzagski.com) (<http://www.zigzagski.com>)) offers private lessons from €46 (£38) for one hour; and from €330 (£274) for a day off-piste.

THE BEST PLACES TO STAY

Chalet Résidence La Renardière £

Thirty-five stylish apartments for two to six people, offering a breakfast service, a spa and laundry (0033 450 344562; [renardiere.com](http://www.renardiere.com) (<http://www.renardiere.com>)); seven nights from €510/£423, based on two sharing).

Hôtel Les Gai Soleil £

A centrally situated, modest three-star family-run hotel with a small spa. Packed lunches on request (450 344074; [augaisoleil-hotel-restaurant.com](http://www.augaisoleil-hotel-restaurant.com) (<http://www.augaisoleil-hotel-restaurant.com>)); seven nights' half board from €483/ £401 per person).

Hôtel Le Morillon ££

Well situated, close to the cable car, and comfortable, with spa and an indoor pool (450 344072; [hotellemorillon.com](http://www.hotellemorillon.com) (<http://www.hotellemorillon.com>)); seven nights' half board from €665/ £552 per person).

Chalet des Collines £££

Built two years ago and sleeps 16. Five minutes by car to the lift or 15 minutes in the ski bus. Chalet manager delivers bread and croissants every day (included in the price). If you don't want to self-cater,

Mountain Kitchen (647 320881; [mountain-kitchen.com](http://www.mountain-kitchen.com) (<http://www.mountain-kitchen.com>)) will deliver ready -cooked meals ([chaletdescollines.com](http://www.chaletdescollines.com) (<http://www.chaletdescollines.com>)) ; from £2,960 per week).

THE BEST RESTAURANTS

Le Monde à l'Envers, Samoëns ££

Close to the main square, this popular restaurant produces creative Savoyard food. Book, especially at weekends, as tables are much in demand (450 341936).

L'Beu, Morillon £

Just above the bottom of Sairon chairlift; a tiny, rustic restaurant with a handful of tables. Crêpes are a speciality, along with fondue and local génépi (450 901789).

L'Igloo, Morillon £

At the top of Bergin chairlift; no reservations. Big sunny terrace, cosy log fire and good-value food.

Gîte du Lac de Gers, Samoëns £

Halfway down the Cascades piste and only open when snow conditions are good. Essential to book: phone from the piste to be towed up. Overnight stays possible (450 895514).

Le Michet, Flaine ££

Next to the Grandes Platières telecabin in Flaine. A smart restaurant with excellent food; it gets busy so it's essential to book (450 908008).

WHAT TO AVOID

Getting stuck in Morillon. Ski buses are erratic outside peak times. It's only five minutes by taxi (€10/£8), but finding one can be tricky.

If you're determined to get the bus, avoid getting the wrong one. Routes are colour-coded and yellow and orange can be easily confused.

Some restaurants don't take reservations so if you are a large party choose a restaurant where you can book.