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BAZAAR

Northern lights
Star gazing
ice skating
fairy stories
& magical
couture for a
snow queen

A WINTER'S TALE

My true love sent to me... an owl in a Christmas tree



BAZAAR

ESCAPE

Edited by LUCY HALFHEAD

CONSUMER MAGAZINE

TRAVEL
SECTION

OF THE YEAR

Travel Media
Awards

WINTER WONDERLANDS

In search of the Northern Lights. Plus: snowmobiling
in Quebec; skiing in Verbier; and following in the
footsteps of the Royals in Klosters

*The Arctic landscape
surrounding
Kakslauttanen in
Finnish Lapland*



HIGH HEAVEN

Rachel Johnson has been skiing since she was a child, but the perfect combination of resort and chalet had always eluded her – until now



Skiing is a sport of highs and lows. I've skied most of Europe over the past four decades and consequently have sucked up more than my share of lows – as you would, if you started skiing aged eight with the European School, where kids decamped from Brussels to the Alps for 'classes de neige' (I returned with a smashed knee on an ambulance train). I've encountered artificial snow; no snow; tiny, overheated apartments; half-term crowds and spring slush; Pokémon onesies. But loyal ski lovers keep the faith, live in hope, take it to the mountain, and finally I have found nirvana.

So please allow me to introduce Chalet Chouqui in Verbier, which ticks every box. Superb views over the plateau and the mountains of the Mont Blanc range massing majestically on the other side (tick); top chefs (tick); the largest indoor pool and spa in Verbier (tick); *grand confort* (tick); fully staffed by eight young, highly trained hosts, drivers, chefs, masseuses (tick, tick, tick). I still dream about the smoked-polenta starter (you lifted the lid of your jam jar and smoke slithered out) and the 'molecular' cheese course – one of seven in the tasting menu – a mouthful of cheese ice-cream in a crunchy cone.

In fact, several members of our party loved the chalet so much that even on a 'bluebird day' (a perfect combination of fresh snow and blue skies) they had to be dragged from the outdoor Jacuzzi or the fireside – where there were always moist cakes and today's papers – onto the slopes. And there, the party carries on. Verbier boasts the highest fondue in Europe (in the Mont-Fort igloo bar) and James Blunt, Carl Fogarty and Lawrence Dallaglio's modernist mountain burger bar La Vache, not to mention some of the finest skiing I've ever had (thanks to Toby Mallock from Performance Verbier).



There are 410 kilometres of runs in the 4 Vallées. In one short day I comfortably skied 50 kilometres over the resort's famous freerider 'itinerary' trails, which are somewhere between piste and off-piste skiing, traversing and looping from one valley to the next. And yes, that included a long lunch at Le Bois Sauvages, as well as a 1,750-metre marathon uninterrupted run from the peak of Mont-Fort at 3,300 metres. No wonder ski buffs agree that Verbier has the best lift-accessible off-piste areas in Europe.

Other peak moments: facetime with Ski Verbier Exclusive's co-owner Tom Avery, who holds the world record for being the youngest man to reach both poles; he convinced me that no, I didn't want to spend 35 days trudging across pack ice and then sleeping in a frozen sleeping bag, thanks. 'One of the things I love about Verbier is going off marked trails and exploring the back country, the limitless terrain,' he said. Anyone who has skied Courchevel in the first week of April along with half of Moscow will agree.

Now I know it's not cheap, but if you break it down, it's not stupidly expensive either. Especially if you manage to avoid splurging in the resort's designer boutiques. Ski Verbier and Tom Avery deliver more than value for money – they deliver the dream. □

A week at Chalet Chouqui costs from £3,600 a person based on 18 sharing, including breakfast and most meals, a chauffeur and an in-chalet ski equipment fitting with Mountain Verbier (www.mountainairverbier.com), with Ski Verbier Exclusive (01608 674011; www.skiverbierexclusive.com). Private guiding and tuition can be arranged with Performance Verbier (www.performanceverbier.com). Swiss operates flights to Switzerland from £39 one way (0345 990 9161; www.swiss.com).