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GRAZIA **TRAVELING**

Swish you were h

Above: skiing in the shadow of breathtaking Mont Blanc in the French Alps

Far left, above and top: Jane's 'doodle' apartment; left: Verbania; right: chef's grill; and 'Stinger' the chef; above right: Jane, ski instructor Nicol, Arthur and Jonah

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Hands up who wants to be whizzing down a mountain right now with the sun on your face and the wind in your hair? Well, it's not too late to book a ski trip. The *Grazia* team has scoured the Alps for the best deals...



FOR PAMPERED POWDER HOUNDS

Editor-in-chief Jane Bruton went to Verbier in Switzerland

'Oh. My. God. The brochure! It all started with the brochure. I say brochure, but this was a book. A hard-backed, thick tome stuffed with droolie *World Of Interiors*-style photos selling, not something as pedestrian as a holiday, goodness no. More a dream. So I knew my holiday with CK Verbier was going to be good. I just didn't realise I would be tainted for life - will any other ski trip even touch it?

Even the journey went smoothly, with a driver greeting us at the airport wielding a cool box of champagne and chocolates. Woo-hoo! But if the blacked-out Range Rover and bubbly were impressive, it was our accommodation that gave us the best 'pinch me, I'm dreaming' moment. Les Esserts is a four to six person arrangement set within a Ferrero Rocher chocolate box chalet of three apartments. As Izzi, our chalet host, showed us around I behaved nonchalantly like I was used to such luxury as a Gaggenau designer kitchen, goose-down duvets plumper than Christopher Biggins, hand-embroidered alpine cushions, carved stone fireplaces, sheepskin-covered chairs and rustic but oh-so-chic tree-trunk tables. But inside I was effervescing with glee and wondering how often they would replace the Jo Malone products.

There was Sky TV, Wii, complimentary bar and wine list (Krug sadly was at a supplement!), iPod dock and toys for my boys, Arthur and Jonah. Across the hall was a fabulous slate swimming pool, steam room and massage area. Sigh. No wonder Justin Timberlake tried to book out the whole building and that, during our stay, I noticed my husband Johnny pruning in the shallow end in the hope of catching a glimpse of the supermodel staying upstairs.

Of course, a ski holiday is not just about your gorgeous, yippee chalet. It's about the skiing (isn't it?), and Verbier has it all. A traditional yet subtly chi-chi sunny Swiss village, it boasts over 400km of pistad runs that link four different valleys offering a fondue of delights for everyone from the most Bambi-legged beginner to the most loose-limbed expert. Even though we had the use of that Range Rover and driver 24/7, everything is easily walkable, even in ski boots (although with kids in tow the driver service took all the stress out of the morning gloves/boots fuff). There is also just the right amount of shiny shops for retail therapy and bars for an après snifter.

While Arthur and Jonah were whisked away by Altitude Ski School in the morning, I met my

Performance Ski instructor Nicol Kindness. His name gave me hope! Maybe he would have patience, too! With careful coaxing, he helped me conquer my fear of black runs and perfect my parallels on reds. Annoyingly, he also improved Johnny's (former snowboarder) skiing to such a point he began to overtake me - grrrr! But it was the family lessons that were a revelation. Nicol managed to help us all at once, individually tailoring his tuition to suit our personalities and needs.

We loved being out in the fresh air all day, but there was always a frisson of excitement as we headed home in the afternoon to see what our private chef Neil, aka 'Stinger', was whipping up for dinner. Would it be a shellfish feast of roasted lobster and Thai spiced mussels, or loin of mustard-glazed veal with a red wine jus? The boys were entranced by the way he effortlessly spun sugar over a Baileys sabayon or knocked up a slash of peanut brittle to garnish a chocolate tart. And his breakfasts - don't get me started! This was certainly not your usual chalet fare.

In fact, the thought of Stinger having a night off started to make me feel a bit panicky (yikes, being so pampered was turning me into Mariah Carey!) until Izzi suggested we book Ice Karting followed by Le Rouge, the coolest après-ski-joint-come-restaurant in the resort (lerouge-verbier.com). Its dessert of homemade brioche with coconut Noir ice cream washed down with an epic Swiss Pinot Noir Reserve de Caveau 2007 made it worth the wrench of leaving the chalet for a few hours.

The hardest wrench of all though was leaving at the end of the week. It wasn't just the Jo Malone products I wanted to steal. Stinger, Izzi, Andy the driver, the chic interiors, hell even Nicol (though what he would do in central London I have no idea)... I wanted to take them all home. Which I guess is the point of a not-just-great holiday but an all-encompassing memorable one. Like mind readers, the CK Verbier crew seemed to know everything we liked and wanted to do on an hour-by-hour basis. Need a babysitter or nanny? Petit Verbier to the rescue! Husky sledging? Woof woof, done. Next year I know exactly where I want to be. Same time, same place. And maybe while I'm sipping one of Stinger's delicious Bitter Sweet Symphony cocktails in the pool I might see Justin Timberlake. In Speedos. If he can get a room that is. It's very exclusive don't you know.

The lowdown

Jane stayed at Les Esserts, from £946 per person, per week based on full occupancy. Price includes meals and wine, chalet host, personal chef and 24-hour chauffeur. Visit www.ckverbier.com or call +41 (0)79 428 0172 to book. EasyJet (www.easyJet.com) flies to Geneva from many UK airports, from £27.99 one-way, including all taxes. For ski school details, see www.performanceverbier.com. ▶



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FOR SNOW SOPHISTICATES

Set between the bigger resorts of St Anton and Lech, Zürs in Austria is high enough to guarantee snow throughout the whole ski season. News features editor Louisa Pritchard and her

husband booked a trip there with holiday company Powder Byrne.

'My ski trips tend to be mostly spent trying to figure out the piste map and, as a boarder, working out how to avoid button lifts at all costs. But on this trip, thanks to Powder Byrne's complimentary guiding service, all we needed to do was enjoy the snow. My guide, Oly, sorted out absolutely everything: from getting my board waxed through to picking the best runs. He even arranged lunch reservations, so we had the best outside tables in the sun every day. My favourite was the Hospiz Alm in St Christoph, which has a slide down to the loos – genius if you're struggling in your ski boots! We stayed in the Arlberghaus Hotel in Zürs, which was absolutely lovely, with an amazing six-course meal every night. There's also a gym and spa. Off the slopes, Zürs itself is pretty quiet, but there are the resorts of Lech and St Anton nearby if you want something a bit livelier – check out the notorious Krazy Kanguruh bar in St Anton.'

The lowdown

Louisa stayed at the 4* Hotel Arlberghaus in Zürs; seven nights from £1,703 per person or three nights from £1,000 per person (based on two sharing), including accommodation on a half-board basis, return flights from London, return transfers and resort service. For booking and enquiries, please call the Powder Byrne team on 020 8246 5300 or visit www.powderbyrne.com.



The Trittkopf cable car in Zürs



FOR APRÈS SKIERS

Méribel in France, in the heart of Les 3 Vallées – the world's largest skiing region – has a buzzing nightlife. Associate beauty editor Lauren Murdoch-Smith hit the town.

'If après ski is just as important as the on-slope action, book a ski trip to Méribel with VIP Chalets. With eight luxury chalets to choose from (see left and right), they're perfect for your first time or your annual ski jaunt. The hippest bar in town is Dicks Tea Bar (sister to the famous Dicks in Val d'Isère), often frequented by A-listers and royalty. Its speciality is the 'Ski Boot', literally a ski boot full of a delicious champagne cocktail. When you've recovered from the night before, the resort's wide, long runs suit the more relaxed skier or if you're an adrenaline seeker, head to Mont Vallon, one of the most rated off-piste areas.'



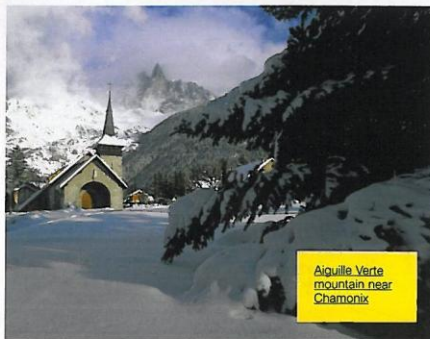
The lowdown

To book, visit www.vip-chalets.com/Resorts/Meribel or call 0844 557 3119. All VIP holidays include return flights and transfers, breakfast, afternoon tea and three-course evening meal with wine (on six days). Check out Dicks at www.dicksteabar.com/meribel.

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GRAZIA **LIVING**



Aiguille Verte mountain near Chamonix

The lowdown

Rose stayed at Amazon Creek (www.amazoncreek.co.uk) which sleeps 10 and starts from £2,136 pppw for accommodation and transfers. To book, visit www.whiteblancmange.com or ring 020 3239 2244. Chamonix offers a three-day ski pass from £96 (www.compagniedumontblanc.fr). Flights to Geneva from £101 return with Swiss International (www.swiss.com)



FOR ADRENALIN JUNKIES
Chamonix is a lively resort in the French Alps under the shadow of Mont Blanc. Beauty assistant Rose Beer booked a trip with travel company White Blancmange.
 'I knew a stay at the Chalet

Amazon Creek in Chamonix would be action-packed. After all, it was organised by White Blancmange, fast getting a reputation as one of the hottest ski companies around. What I hadn't factored in was the heart-pumping adventure I would be going on. I suppose I should have realised – after all, one of the company's founders is an ex-SAS ski instructor.

The highlights of the trip were an incredible helicopter tour which included a surprise landing on the top of Mont Blanc before we were (luckily) deposited halfway down the mountain to ski down, plus our glacier guide, Kathy Murphy, escorting us down the famous "Vallée Blanche", an awe-inspiring sea of ice that's beautiful, breathtaking and utterly exhilarating.

But a holiday with White Blancmange is not all vertigo-inducing adventure. Its bespoke service means each member of a party gets exactly the holiday they want. That means a driver on call to ferry you to the bars and restaurants and back, a masseuse on call to make sure you wind down, as well as an in-chalet hammam and Jacuzzi. Now that's what I call a ski holiday! ■

Edited by Nicholas Kyrnaston Photos: 4 Corner Images, John Norris