

JN LIFE

Sing as you Ski



Beatrice Sayers finds the perfect place to stay for a family holiday in Avoriaz–Morzine

You could call it high anxiety – 1,800 metres above sea level to be exact – though the worry itself was small.

My nervousness was a legacy of my first skiing trip, when an ankle injury on the third day had confined me to the chalet. On this, my second trip, I was returning to the same area of France, and I was with my daughter. The aim was to introduce her to a sport she'd been keen to try, and to rediscover a joy of skiing. We smashed both targets, thanks to the unique, family-run hotel where we stayed.

The slopes were buzzing on our first morning on skis because mid-December was the first week of the season. We had booked a two-hour private lesson with Pierre, organised through the hotel's owner, Chilly Powder. Pierre sensed our keenness but knew that confidence was everything, so he took things slowly. Twenty minutes later we were ready

to take a chairlift up to the 'plateau' of Avoriaz (the z is silent) where, to my amazement, we skied down a 2km blue run. At the end of the morning, at the bottom of the Boulevard des Skieurs, Pierre saw the grin on my face. "C'est bien le ski," he said, in acknowledgement. "Oui, je l'aime," I replied.

The following morning, though, my nervousness returned. I confided in Francesca, the hotel's owner, and she had a tip. "You need to sing. Out loud," she said. Seeing my hesitancy, she added emphatically: "Sing the words." Doing this would stop my upper body tensing up. Soon afterwards, I was making my way through show tunes from *West Side Story* to Lloyd Webber to the *Sound of Music*; so apt for



Hotel Au Coin Du Feu and (left) Beatrice and daughter Freyde

the Alps, I told myself smugly. And, as Chanukah was a few days away, I began another song as I leaned into my boots and prepared to set off down the 2km run we had mastered with Pierre.

"Maoz tsur yeshua—" crash. The previous day's snow had turned to ice and, as I fell forward, limbs splayed, my voice stopped as abruptly as my progress down the slope.

With a bruised thumb and wounded pride, it helped to be staying at a luxury hotel. Our accommodation, Au Coin du Feu (At the Fireside), in Morzine, is perfectly situated for the slopes of Avoriaz because it's right at the foot of the mountain: five minutes' walk from the Prodains Express cable car ("better than a fairground ride," my daughter noted) that



daughter and I travelled up the mountain on the button lift, silent beauty all around punctuated only by the occasional jangle of the metal arm righting itself.

On the blue run from the day before something clicked; she was doing some impressive parallel turns and mine were definitely getting more parallel by the day. Beaming with pride, that evening at the hotel we asked Ben, one of Chilly Powder's ski school assistants, to suggest a new route, and the following day we arrived, just as the piste map promised, at Les Lindarets, a tiny village which in summer has hundreds of goats roaming through it.

Francesca and Paul, the British-born couple who set up Chilly Powder in 1996, met while working in Morzine and brought up their family in the hotel they built. "As our children grew and we realised what people needed, so we expanded," Francesca told me. Le Coin Au Feu now has 53 beds, including family rooms, as well as smaller chalets sleeping up to 15, but retains a homely feel.

As free shuttle buses brought skiers to and from the centre of Morzine to the Prodains Express, we were just a walk away, and were being thoroughly pampered, not least by Annie, who gave my daughter a 50-minute massage in the cosy spa tent next to the hotel. A miracle? Almost. Magical? Without a doubt. "Maoz tsur yeshua-ski, lecha na'eh leshabe'ah..."



Wedding suite

takes you to the resort. At 1,800m, Avoriaz is rarely short of snow in the winter and offers a quiet elegance. Its tall buildings, mostly covered in red cedar wood, blend in with the mountains and the village itself is entirely pedestrianised, though with plenty of restaurants, cafes and shops for delicious lunch and rest breaks and necessities.

We stayed half-board at Hotel Au Coin du Feu, where the hospitality extends to so much more than food: every member of staff has a smile and a kind word. Our evening routine was a treat, with scones and cake



Afternoon tea

at 4.30pm to welcome us home before we unwound in the outdoor hot tub. Dinner itself was outstanding. Exquisite canapes at 7.45pm were followed by four excellent courses – including cheese – with fine wines included. My smugness returned.

Our third day's skiing was a joy. Heavy snow overnight lay thick and powdery on the slopes and, a blessing, the sun shone as my

Childcare, ski school – and kosher food on request

Chilly Powder operates all year round. Winter packages (half-board) for individuals, groups and families start from €995 pp per week based on two adults sharing. Childcare is available, from €315 a week, and ski school for €295 a week. Chilly Powder also offers self-catered and B&B options in both summer and winter, and is available for weddings and events. Kosher catering can be arranged by special request.

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