



St Martin de Belleville The Skiers Choice for Les Trois Vallees

By Tim Stevens for International Excellence Luxury Magazine

It is always the way, to find the best you have to seek it out. That is quite a job when you are looking for a ski chalet in the world's largest ski area which comprises so many villages and resorts. The resorts include Courchevel 1850 with 15 five star hotels, a Milky Way of Michelin stars and a veritable torrent of the premium global brands all competing loudly for attention. Still looking for



the best but in other characteristics is St. Martin de Belleville a characterful Savoyard village which has a Michelin starred restaurant, some atmospheric bars and other local restaurants. These two very different resorts share one thing in common; a vast skiing area that has exhaustive scope in the number of runs and numerous other attractions and activities for the non-skiers. Looking at the piste map; whilst St. Martin is on the periphery, a new express six-person covered lift soon speeds everyone into the core of the Trois Vallees.

Wanting the best of everything, but within the bounds of a budget that allows other indulgences does present its challenges. However, I came across 'The Alpine Club' which has three beautifully presented chalets, it helps that Helen; the boss (actually more a team leader) has a husband who is

an accomplished British architect. They have incorporated all the facilities you could wish for knitted into two historic and one new chalet (guests; 8+2, 8 and 6+3 respectively). They are very individual, characterful and exude a warm atmosphere, so when you wake up in the morning you know where you are and know that is where you want to be.

The front door of 'The Ecurie' chalet (8 guests) is an appropriately wide and substantial one. When you open it, there is an immediate light and friendly welcome; there is an eclectic mix of rustic and



new fittings and furnishings that work very well together. Although my bedroom was not overly large it easily accommodated a King size bed, convertible to a twin, but again there is the overwhelming feeling of quiet integrity. Wend your way up the stone stairs to the main living/dining room with the original stable roof high above with its substantial timbers. In the centre is a modern open fireplace which acts as a visual divider between the dining and main sitting areas. Both are spacious, the dining area has an open kitchen and large dining table. The whole scenario is relaxing, a foretaste of the evening ahead.

The warmth also comes from each chalet's team, they want to be there for the style of life and they obviously get a kick from sharing the pleasure with guests. As a former tour operator, it is easy to identify if your employees are just staff, for the best results they have to be a team.

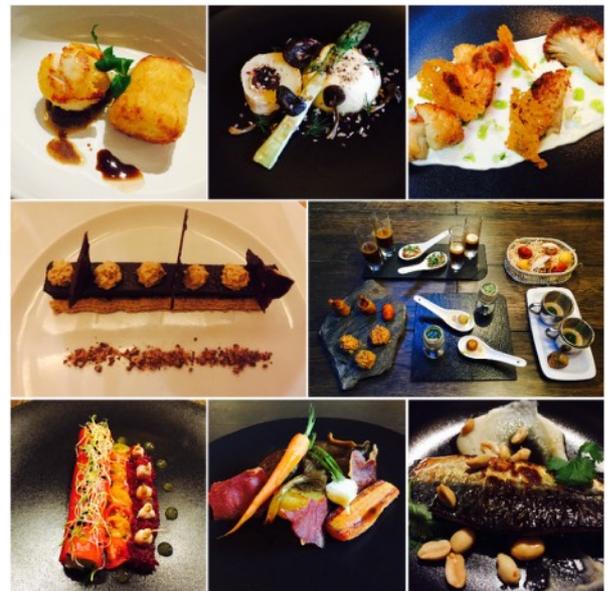
Part of each chalet's team is a driver who will take you in a 4x4 the four minutes' drive to the lift which normally has more than enough capacity to avoid queuing. The Ski-in, Ski-out 'trophy' feature is frequently simply not true, e.g. Fairmont Whistler, or vastly over-rated as most have a very short run that delivers you to the main lift for the resort with its queues for the first runs of the day. If you have a good run, then that is



great and they can be found in the Trois Vallees.

I stayed during a week when the chalet could be booked by the room with a no children policy. Whilst the primary interest in common was obviously skiing, we were all fairly like-minded so the conversation flowed well as did the complimentary wines, etc.

To complement the high standards of the chalet, our professional chef was more than a match for the local restaurants and his culinary expertise was exceptional. The basis is breakfast, afternoon tea with cake, which would send any calorie count off the scale throughout the week, plus an elaborate and well balanced dinner every night, apart from the chef's night off. You can either walk down to St. Martin's or be chauffeured to a local hostelry for dinner on the free evening. The village centre is one of the few Trois Vallees to have been preserved which is worthwhile, as it has a good local character and is very picturesque. As mentioned, there is a good selection of bars and some restaurants, however you will have to visit the 3* Michelin restaurant to beat our professional chalet chef. The chalet shuttle finishes at 10.00pm but it is only a very short taxi ride back to the chalet for those who wish indulge into the night.



We had been surprised at the premium that is commanded in the better known resorts, it is worth exploring these little known treasures that some local knowledge can unearth. However, as life says everything cannot normally be perfect (something I found in one of the most expensive chalets), I would simply mention the directions given for those arriving by car. You can get within a hundred yards or so of the chalet in the very close knit hamlet centre then? Easily solved by a quick call to say where we were and less than a couple of minutes later a cheery team member lead us just around the corner. Perhaps the addition of a shaving type mirror for contact lens wearers in the bathroom but then there is a shower and more importantly, a really good size of bath complete with plenty of space to put your wine glass whilst relaxing. They really have everything else well sorted for an indulgent stay.

The trip was suggested and organised by; www.skiinluxury.com/; rather than just look at the website, it is worthwhile exploring your ideals on the telephone. There is a mine of information that has been gained from personal experiences so they can match your every need.

www.thealpineclub.co.uk/st-martin.html