



Chalet Abode is ideally located for the lifts to whisk you up to the slopes of the Three Valleys



ALPINE STYLE

As ski season gets underway, here's why you should consider a trip to St Martin de Belleville

Words LORRAINE CRIGHTON-SMITH

There's something magical about St Martin de Belleville. The picture-postcard alpine village in the Three Valleys ski area has a more refined feel than neighbouring party resort Meribel and it has a truly impressive ski area to suit all abilities.

At an altitude of 1,450m, and with 600km of pistes, this snowy scene is a ideal place for skiers and snowboarders. For advanced skiers there's several red and black runs to explore, while there are a choice of confidence-boosting green and blue runs too. Whatever your level, there are enough runs to keep it exciting, but it is well worth booking a local guide or a lesson from local ski school ESF Les Menuires & St Martin de Belleville.

We travelled to St Martin in January, when 30cm of snow had fallen. The conditions were some of the best I've

ever skied in, but you don't have to ski to enjoy an alpine adventure here. Snowshoeing with a local guide is a fun alternative. We trekked through the peaceful village of Beranger (breaking the peace with fits of giggles when one took a tumble in the snow).

After a day out, we couldn't wait to get back to Chalet Abode, in nearby Villarabout.

Abode, which sleeps 8-10 guests, is one of The Alpine Club's luxurious reclaimed Savoyard chalets, run by British couple Chris and Helen Raemers. No expense has been

spared at Abode, or at its sister chalets Chamois Lodge (which has a hot tub) and The Ecurie, a brand new addition to the collection due to open its doors in December. Chris, an architect, designed the chalets and Helen added the finishing touches that give them a boutique feel.

Staying with The Alpine Club feels like being a VIP in an exclusive members' club. From Geneva we were transferred by Coolbus (thecoolbus.co.uk) to the door, where Helen greeted us. After a tour of the stylish chalet, our affable chauffeur, Keith Morron, drove us to ski rental shop Twinners (twinners-saint-martin-de-belleville.fr/en) to pick up all the gear.

The superb service continued back at Abode, where host Amandine Ropp and fine-dining chef Sam Greensmith worked tirelessly to bring us breakfast, afternoon

tea and a gastronomic six-course taster menu dinner, with paired wines, each day. On Sam and Amandine's day off, head to Chez Pépé Nicolas, in Val Thorens, to sample authentic Savoyard cuisine including raclette.

Gourmet
cuisine
at Chalet
Abode



One week in January at Chalet Abode costs £1,265 pp. Our trip was arranged by Alpine Luxury Chalets, which has a portfolio of luxury chalets in top resorts in the Alps. 020 3358 0284; alpineluxurychalets.com