



# Pampered on the piste

**Annmarie  
O'Connor**  
hits the slopes  
in Morzine and  
enjoys a taste  
of the high life  
in the luxury  
French resort

**M**Y EXPERIENCE of skiing to date involved one ill-fated woosh down the bunny slopes in 1994. The end result? A twisted ankle and a knock to the head with a ski-chair. With this I had determined life on terra firma had its advantages; that was until I was invited to experience the Highlife.

A group trip to French resort Morzine with Ireland's leading ski chalet specialist, Highlife, was in the offing. Was I ready to redeem my reputation as a human snowball? Would beginner's lessons and a fresh piste be a sufficient lure? I was unsure, until I realised this wasn't any ordinary ski trip. All-inclusive perks such as a personal chef, wine cellar, hot tub, appointed chalet host, killer views and daily doses of fondue all caught my attention. If I was going to be subject again to the whims of gravity, it would take more than a hot chocolate and an ice pack to soothe my wounds.

Indeed "more" seemed to sum up the Highlife offer. For eight seasons now, the Irish-owned company has built a reputation of providing hassle-free ski and snowboard experiences with unique personal touches. With a dedicated account manager appointed to each holiday booking, a group chalet is arranged along with individual ski packs — from newbie to off-piste specialists — for each guest. Mine included a combination of beginner ski lessons and slope-free activities. Others — the thrill of 28 black runs; or crossing from France to Switzerland on the Portes du Soleil.

There it was — sorted. No turning back. Not that I would have wanted to. After a three-hour flight from Dublin to Lyon, we were greeted by a Highlife representative who drove us to our slate-clad

Chalet Valmont in the Northern Alps. Boasting its own themed rooms with flat screen TVs, bathrobes, slippers and turn-down service, our trendy digs boasted its own distinct character, much like the nine other Highlife properties: from the Chalet Delphine with its outdoor hot tub to the spacious Sorrine with its home cinema and games room.

I would have been happy to try out my en-suite jacuzzi then and there but we were swiftly escorted to the ski shop for a boot fitting. Back at base our chalet host greeted us with a soothing "vin chaud", followed by a three-course dinner prepared by our personal chef, Adam and an evening of free-pouring wine. Breakfast was no different. Pancakes and bacon, fresh fruit and porridge, smoothies and eggs anyway-you-want-them all made the table with bottled water, tissues and chocolate bars doled out as piste treats. A bit like having mammy in salopettes. And the pampering didn't end there.

As a "ski in ski out" village, Morzine takes visitors from the village directly to the ski runs. No arduous transfers in bulky ski boots which suited my less than graceful disposition. And when the ski lifts ended, the one-on-one treatment continued with my own personal instructor who skilfully guided me through a series of half-day skiing lessons.

To my surprise, I had progressed from a moving liability to a fairly confident skier. The two blue runs I completed on the Pléney and Super Morzine were not without incident however — one involved using my instructor as an airbag while falling off a moving chair-lift. What can I say? Old habits die hard. Despite this, I was pleased; even more with the après-ski goodies from mobile masseurs providing post-piste muscle rubs, to free daily events such as snow frisbee and toboggan races; not forgetting the 41 bar-restaurants at hand on the chef's day off.

Thankfully my itinerary involved activities not combining speed, altitude and innocent bystanders. Several days' skiing can prove exhausting for a gal only used to navigating cobblestones in high heels. Snow-shoe walking proved a scenic alternative, especially through the rugged niches of the Super Morzine, while a tour of Morzine's idyllic market town streets was a treat in itself, especially when followed back at Valmont with a log fire and an aperitif. Our last day at Morzine involved a

group blue run with one of Highlife's Ski Guides — a complimentary service which lets guests experience the best runs without having to spend hours studying a piste map. Given I got lost to-boganning on our sophomore day down a baby hill (the less said about that the better), I felt I would be best if I tested out one of our chalet hot tubs instead and risk tempting fate. Despite being the most inexperienced in our group, I was disappointed the trip ended so soon. The concierge experience meant we could all just concentrate on having fun — mission accomplished. Rumour has it that Highlife is now upping the ante for 2009/10 with an extended ski guiding service, bespoke travel arrangements, a Highlife Kids' Club during key family weeks and complimentary chalet bars.

Who knows? Maybe I'll come back again with the aim of achieving a vertical success rate. Failing that, I could adapt a prone position in the hot tub with a glass of wine and a view of Mont Blanc. Either way sounds good to me.

Highlife Ski & Snowboard: The Highlife season runs from December 13, 2009, with their award-winning ski holidays available from €805 for an adult and €658 for a child under 12. Prices do not include flights. Contact: 01 6771100; email: [info@highlife.ie](mailto:info@highlife.ie); [www.highlife.ie](http://www.highlife.ie).

## Morzine by numbers

- 207 ski-lifts
- 278 ski slopes covering 650 kms (28 blacks, 116 reds, 112 blues and 41 greens)
- 214 kms of cross-country ski tracks
- 385 kms of snowshoe paths
- 41 bar-restaurants (11 on ski-slopes)
- 75 km from Geneva International Airport
- 10 snowparks
- Three half-pipes
- four boarder-crosses



**LAP OF LUXURY:** Clockwise from left, Skiers on the slope on Morzine; interior shots of Chalet Valmont featuring the kitchen and one of the luxury bedrooms.



**SLOPE SUCCESS:** Morzine takes visitors from the village directly to the ski runs.