

Peak season



HAPPY VALLEY: The picturesque resort of Meribel offers fantastic skiing and great facilities (below)



LATE BREAKS

CAUSEWAY COAST RENTALS

Tel: 028 7083 2220 or see causewaycoastrentals.co.uk
Three nights in a five-bedroom house in the centre of Portballintrae with private parking, wi-fi and sea views, sleeps ten for £550. Three nights in a three-bedroom cottage in Portstewart with wi-fi, sea views and less than ten minutes' walk to the promenade, sleeps six for £300. Three nights in a luxury four-bedroom townhouse in Portrush with wi-fi, private parking and views of West Strand Beach, sleeps eight for £600. We also have properties in Bushmills, Ballycastle, Castlerock & Belfast.

FALCON DIRECT

Tel: 028 90 389 359 or visit falconholidays.co.uk
Belfast to Lapland, Falcon's Day Trip, £459 per adult, £429 per child; Sept 30, Belfast to Sharm El Sheikh, Coral Sea Aqua Club, 3-star All Inc, 7 nights, £669pp; Oct 5, Belfast to Tenerife, Laguna Park II, Playa De Los Americas, 3-stars, SC, 7 nights, £389pp; May 29, Belfast to Costa Dorada, Hotel Cala Font, Cap Salou, 3-star HB, 7 nights, £509pp.

EUROPA TRAVEL

Tel 028 9062 3211 or visit europatravel.com
Flying from Belfast: Lanzarote, £820, 5-star All Inc, Seaside Jameos, Oct 9, 1 week; Tenerife, £740, 5-star HB, Hotel Roca Nivaria, Oct 14, 1 week; Vilamoura, £619, 5-star B&B, Hotel Tivoli Marina, Oct 14, 9 nights; Vilamoura, £857, 5-star HB, Hotel Tivoli Marina, Oct 14, 9 nights; Albufeira, £399, 4-star SC, Vila Petra, Oct 14, 1 week; Vilamoura, £620, 4-star HB, Hotel Dom Pedro Golf, Oct 14, 1 week; Vilamoura, £790, 4-star All Inc, Dom Pedro Golf, Oct 14, 1 week; Tunisia, £550, 5-star HB, Hotel Movenpick Sousse, Oct 19, 1 week; Tunisia, £580, 5-star HB, Hotel Sindbad Hammamet, Oct 19, 1 week; Tenerife, £556, 5-star All Inc, Hotel Bahia Adeje, Dec 5, 1 week; Tenerife, £533, 4-star HB, Hotel Vulcano, Dec 5, 1 week.

Going on holiday is great — but let's be honest, it can be pretty stressful too. The weeks of planning, worrying how to get from the airport and whether the hotel really is as good as it seems can mean a few days away aren't always as relaxing as they should be.

Now think of a holiday where all that is taken care of, right down to the final detail — even the weather conditions.

With Highlife, holidays don't have to mean hassle. The award-winning Irish ski chalet company specialises in everything needed for a terrific trip — world-class resorts, great chalets, high-quality food and service, plus unbeatable snowtime.

You can take my word for it, as in April I joined a Highlife trip to Meribel in the French Alps.

Part of the famed Three Valleys, the iconic ski resort boasts stunning scenery, high-altitude runs and — most importantly — plenty of snow.

Although a seasoned traveller, this was different to any other holiday I'd been on.

From the moment our group, weary-eyed from a 4.45am start, took off from Dublin until we touched back down in Ireland, every detail had been mapped out.

This wasn't a restrictive, tightly packaged holiday, but a trip where all the time-consuming little extras had been well taken care of.

After touching down in Geneva, a minibus was waiting to whisk our seven-strong group direct to our chalet in Meribel.

Within two hours of arriving, we were on the slopes.

Adrian Rutherford gets a taste of the Highlife during a ski trip to the French resort of Meribel

For someone with limited skiing experience, it was an unnerving — and rather stop-start — experience getting reacquainted with skis.

But my remarkably patient instructor Cedric was constantly on hand to pick me up — literally — and get me going again with words of encouragement and advice.

Once I'd rediscovered the knack of staying on two feet, my confidence returned. The time whizzed by, as did the spectacular countryside, warm rays of spring sunshine beating down as I sliced through soft, perfectly white snow.

While there are a range of resorts across Europe, France remains a favourite for skiers, with Meribel one of the jewels in the crown.

Host to the women's alpine skiing at the 1992 Winter Olympics, its famed slopes draw in hundreds of thousands of visitors each year, many from the UK and Ireland.

The setting is also stunning, with its pretty, chalet-style architecture, wooded surroundings and breathtaking views of snow-capped peaks.

However, the skiing is only part of the story with Highlife. The clue really is in the name — and not simply because we were nearly 1,400 metres above sea level.

This is an all-round luxury holiday experi-

ence where fine dining and homely comforts are an equally important and enjoyable element.

Our quaint, comfortable chalet came complete with our own chef. It was a simple touch but one of the many little extras that helps Highlife stand out from the rest.

Dinner time quickly became one of the high points of the day. It started from the moment we arrived with soup and freshly prepared sandwiches, plus plenty of homemade cakes and pastries to take away for a mid-piste treat.

A three-course dinner was waiting when we arrived back at night. It was perfectly prepared by our chef and specially tailored to each person's dietary requirements.

Each menu read straight from the pages of a high-end restaurant. To give one mouth-watering example, our second evening started with seared fillet of salmon on a bed of pickled fennel and orange salad, followed by roast duck breast with a carrot and orange purée and caramelised shallots.

It was finished by one of the best desserts I've ever tasted — a rich, creamy lemon poissette, perfectly complemented by a crunchy coconut crumble.

The food tasted every bit as good as it sounded, and was accompanied by carefully selected French wines.

Breakfast time was equally enjoyable, with a range of delicious personally-cooked choices available. Our chef and host, along with Highlife's other staff, had been chosen with an emphasis on skill but also personality.

Each day a driver was waiting to shuttle us to and from the slopes, about 10 minutes away from our chalet. Staff were also on hand to sort out our equipment, meaning we were free to relax inside or unwind in the outdoor hot tub after a busy ski session.

Here, time just drifts by. The location is stunning and perfect for a late-afternoon stroll, with the sleepy village of Les Allues just a 20 minute walk away. A relaxing afternoon can also be spent reading or taking in the scenery.

All too soon it was time to leave, but with lasting memories of a wonderfully stress-free holiday.



TRAVELLER'S GUIDE

Getting there: Adrian Rutherford travelled with Aer Lingus, which flies daily from Dublin to Geneva and once weekly during the winter months (starting December 20) from Cork to Geneva. Fares start from €65.99 one-way including taxes and charges. Aer Lingus fly six times a week from Dublin to Lyon. Fares start from €69.99 one-way including taxes and charges.

The Highlife season runs from November 30, 2014, to April 19, 2015, and the award-winning ski holidays are available from €840 for an adult and €686 for a child under 11. Short breaks are also available from three to four nights from €529. Prices

include minibus transfers to and from your chalet, which is home to great facilities including saunas, hot tubs and log fires, delicious food, good wines and a complimentary bar and Highlife Ski Discovery Tours.

As a fully bonded, licensed travel agent, Highlife will also organise your flights from any point of departure to ensure that you enjoy flexibility as well as the lowest possible airfares.

More information: For full details on Highlife's range of ski chalet holidays in France visit highlife.ie or tel: 00353 1677 1100, email: info@highlife.ie