



# ANYONE FOR SOME MORE BUBBLY?



**Aisling Breen and her VBFs raise a glass to hot tubs, hunky instructors and on-call masseurs at a chic ski chalet in Meribel**

**I**T WAS then that I realised... I was starring in *Sex And The City Goes Skiing*. There we were, three of my VBFs and I, necking champagne in an outdoor hot tub while we debated the finer points of our ski instructors in the stunningly pretty French ski resort of Meribel. And all the bubbles were definitely bringing on the giggles.

'Oh, his technique is just fab.'

'Oh, he is just so patient.'

'Oh, did you see how he saved me from going over the edge?'

The discussion descended quicker than a downhill ski champ into Alpine tans, charm ratings and, of course, toned physiques.

Joan, Siobhán, Helen et moi decided that Phillipe, a George Clooneyesque charmer, fared particularly well. He may have been more mature in years than most of the instructors but he was still the cream of a very handsome crop.

He used to train the French Olympic team but now gives his spare time to training the Meribel youngsters in the children's ski school. Perfect!

Ronan, our Ballymaloe-trained personal chef, didn't do too badly either. His skills in conjuring up fabulous three-course meals were swiftly compared to the men we'd left at home, who, unfortunately, aren't a patch on our cook.

Men aside, of course the conversation slipped into fashion, and my choice of footwear for a night on the town suddenly came under the microscope of my fellow fashionistas.

'You can't go out in the snow in those stiletto boots, the suede will get wrecked.' (Nothing about the likelihood that I could have slipped and landed on my derriere).

So, if you've done the exclusive spas and city breaks and pounded the pavements of New York like Carrie in search of the perfect Cosmopolitan, a chalet ski holiday with all the bells and

whistles in Meribel should be near the top of your list for the ultimate girlie getaway (though, equally, if you wanted to bring the family, they wouldn't be disappointed).

Like a scene from Wham's Last Christmas music video, we spent our days on the pistes in fluffy powder, evenings between boutiques and bars, and nights tucked up snugly in our plush chalet.

The snowcapped peak of Mont Blanc forms a majestic backdrop to the former Olympic venue, which has long been a favourite with English-speaking skiers, each season drawing close to 40pc of its guests from Ireland and Britain.

In Meribel and nearby Morzine, Highlife has been providing growing numbers of Irish skiers with a leap up from cheap and cheerful to deliciously decadent.

From that private hot tub to the freshly baked muffins and aperitifs awaiting your return from the slopes, from saunas to log-burning fires, your own personal chef, and a masseur on call, every creature comfort is catered for.

**B**UT I HAVE to confess, given that the point of a skiing trip is mainly to ski, the time I spent hurtling down the slopes was closely matched by the amount of time I spent lounging in the tub.

In my defence, I found the slopes of Meribel a little daunting for a relatively novice skier – a bit on the steep side (and that was on the green runs).

Beginner's trepidation on the slopes aside, though, the resort is as authentic as they come, exhibiting much more taste than tack, though sometimes at a price

to match. Andorra it ain't – even a pizza can set you back €20.

But the shopping is good and the choice of après-ski plentiful. Meribel's Rond Point bar is the chic afternoon haunt, and Cactus Bar is another good meeting point for a glass of Kir Royale, the resort's favourite tippie.

Beware, though: the Haute Savoie cuisine is not waistline friendly.

With cheese fondue and baskets of dipping bread a mainstay of most menus, you may want to leave your calorie counter at home.

Meribel's ski instructors can also be hard task masters and don't take kindly to sore heads on the slopes, even if the magnificent location and stunning peaks go some way to easing the anguish. With mornings given over to ski instruc-

tion, a Highlife guide is on hand each afternoon to take you on more adventurous slopes and trails, facilitated by state-of-the-art lifts and fast-moving queues.

Meribel is located at the heart of the famous Three Valleys ski area, and you can buy a ski pass that gives you access to the entire area. This links Meribel to the nearby resorts of Courchevel and Val

Thorens to make up the world's largest ski area.

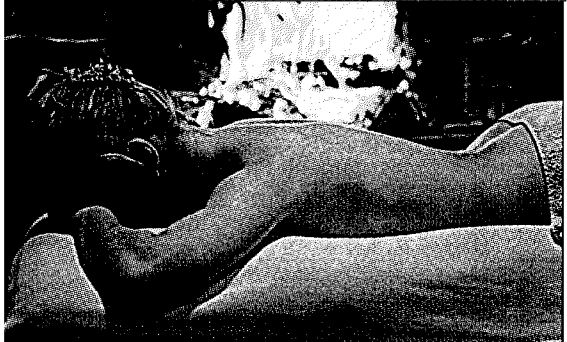
Between them, the resorts have a staggering 375 miles of runs, divided into scary black runs, fractionally less frightening red runs, and my preferred (and just about manageable) blue and green runs.

The days slip by effortlessly between skiing lessons, après-ski and dips in the hot tub, helped along by the excellent regional cooking, both at the chalet and the resort's restaurants. As if by magic, a masseur arrives at the chalet to work on our tired muscles and aching heads – the perfect ending to a girlie bonding break.

Whoever thought of the concept of 'ski detox' is a genius. And Carrie and the girls would certainly raise a glass (or two) to that.

## Getting There

**HIGHLIFE IS** in its fourth season serving the Irish ski market and has a range of eight chalets in Meribel and Morzine-Avoriaz, each sleeping between eight and ten people. They're perfect for a gathering of family or friends, and can also be shared with other skiers if group numbers aren't too substantial. A seven-night stay at the Chalet Carine in Meribel is priced from €1,140 per adult and from €955 per child under 12. This price includes direct flights from Dublin to Geneva, transfers, and accommodation on a dinner, bed and breakfast basis. Book now by calling Highlife on (01) 677 1100 or online at [www.highlife.ie](http://www.highlife.ie)



Highlife's luxurious chalet Carine in Meribel, above, specialises in 'ski detox' including private hot tubs and massage, below

Publication: The Irish Mail on Sunday

Date: Sunday, November 12, 2006

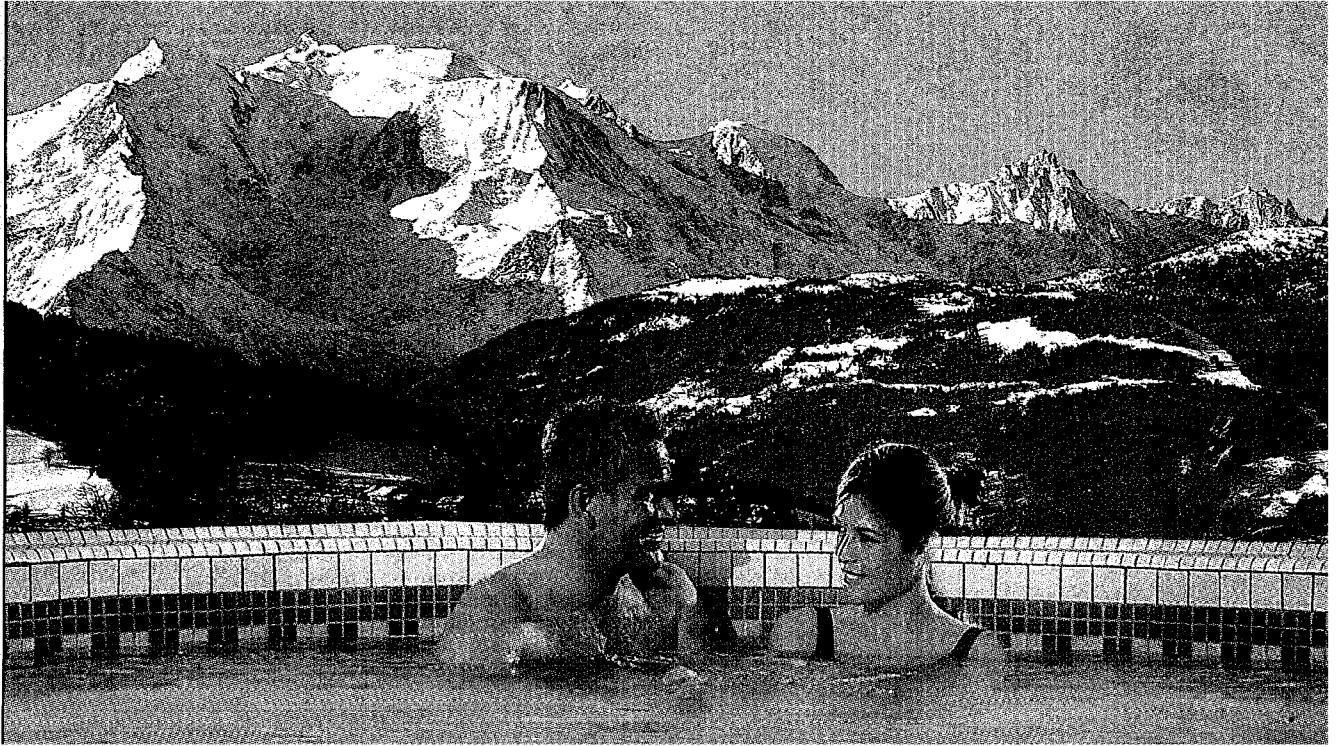
Page: 72

Extract: 4 of 4

Circulation: 139.170

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Headline: ANYONE FOR SOME MORE BUBBLY?



**The soaring peaks of Mont Blanc make a majestic backdrop for après ski dips in an outdoor hot tub in the French Alps**