Three bijou French resorts

VAL CENIS, SAVOIE

If you think you've ticked off all the must-ski resorts in France but haven't tried the Maurienne Valley, you need to book another trip. Strung along this wild-feeling, 80-mile gully are a handful of resorts offering a wide range of ski experiences. At the heart is Val Cenis, a family-friendly, easy-riding zone with 65 pistes and lovely mountain restaurants. Down the valley, La Norma is great for off-piste, especially ski-touring and splitboarding (it hosts an annual splitboarding festival) but also has speedy runs looping through woodland. Traditional Aussois and small and cheerful Valfréjus are other options, with a day in each resort included in the area lift pass. The biggest thrills are at Bonneval sur Arc at the top end, which has quick access to some steep backcountry from the top lifts but also a fun kids' trail with obstacles and giant hands to high-five at the bottom. Peak Retreats has self-drive packages staying at Les Chalets de Flambeau apartments right by Val Cenis's slopes, with an indoor pool and saunas.
Details Seven nights' self-catering from £305pp, including return Eurotunnel LeShuttle crossing (peakretreats.co.uk)

MANIGOD, HAUTE-SAVOIE

The Aravis massif ski resorts are only about an hour's drive south of Geneva, so are handy for a short break and perfect for intermediates and families. Le Grand Bornand has some fabulous rolling off-piste (as well as plenty of easy pistes), La Clusaz is laid-back with quirky activities such as full-moon skiing, while the little farming village resort of Manigod is tiny and traditional, famed as a producer of reblochon cheese, but also with 30 runs. Stay here for an authentic village experience, with short drives or a bus ride to the other ski areas. Pick a chalet such as Chalet Les Houlottes, from the expanding Ovo collection, a cute timber number on the edge of the village with a sun terrace and games room.
Details Seven nights' self-catering for nine from £1,449 (ovonetwork.com). Fly to Geneva

ORELLE, SAVOIE

Tiny Orelle has one big thing going for it: it's linked to Val Thorens and the wider Three Valleys ski area (Méribel, Courchevel, Les Menuires) by a cable car that rises steeply over forest to an exciting swathe of off-piste terrain and intermediate runs to the other Three Valleys resorts. The village itself is a charmer, with little more than a pizza van in the square and a good old-fashioned bar, a ski-hire shop, the bargain hotel Hob Orelle and a smattering of chalets and apartments. Airbnb's "Family Ski Spa Orelle-Val Thorens Hôte altitude" is clad in pine and slate, with access to a shared pool, hammam and sauna. It's easy to come by train too, with the nearest station a ten-minute taxi ride away.
Details Seven nights' self-catering for four from £1,513 (airbnb.co.uk). Fly to Chambéry, Grenoble or Lyon or take the train to St Michel Valloire
Gemma Bowes