



# New Alpine ski resort is something very special

Sainte-Foy's picturesque charm gives bigger spots a run for their money

The sun kisses the top of the mountain, a blush pink breath that warms the cold north face of l'Aiguille Rouge in the French Alps.

From our vantage across the valley in Sainte-Foy-Tarentaise, a small picture-perfect ski resort in France's Savoie department, we watch this mesmerising daily light show as it creeps down the mountain, turning it from blue to pink, gold and suddenly a brilliant white.

It is not long after 8am in Sainte-Foy and the resort moves in time with the sun, first slowly with a shuffle of ski boots and jackets then gathering pace as people jog to the shuttle bus before a final mad dash as parents drop their children at ski school and make for the lifts.

We join the rush, leaving the kids at the Evolution 2 ski school and picking up an instructor.

Colin Waeckel from Evolution 2 takes us onto the mountain, where wood smoke billows from small stone huts while skiers dive into the deep snow between the trees in a resort that is renowned for its back-country skiing.

The pistes are blissfully quiet. "I have booked a private piste for you," jokes Colin with a mischievous

grin as he stops on the empty slope to give us some pointers on our very ropey technique.

The mountain begins to fill up, which we take as our cue to head for some refreshments.

An Italian ski instructor once taught me the magic of stopping for espresso at 10am, long enough to get one run in before the pistes start to become crowded and early enough that the restaurants and mountain huts are still quiet.

We head for Restaurant Les Marquises, a classic mountain hut serving food and hot drinks on the sun-drenched terrace. We order hot chocolate and drink in the views.

Re-emerging as the rest of the mountain heads for lunch, the pistes are quiet again, allowing us to enjoy the snaking blue and red runs that twist down towards the resort's centre.

Despite being the youngest ski resort in the Alps, Sainte-Foy looks like something out of a Christmas card, all wooden chalets, lauze roofs and traditional stone.

This architectural design is no accident but a nod to the area's deep ski heritage that stretches back to the 1920s.

In 1990 when the architects of



Main picture, Thomas Hawkins on a ski run in Sainte-Foy.

Bottom from left: The musher and his husky sled; Thomas's girls meet some of the dogs; Le Ruitor; Sainte-Foy ski resort.

## Offers

### Deals and inspiration

**Explore Vietnam and Cambodia**  
For travellers seeking an unforgettable holiday to south-east Asia, Tropical Sky's Asian Discovery Vespa Road Trip, part of the 20th Anniversary Collection, offers a remarkable option, especially since December-to-April is the best and driest time to visit Vietnam.

This itinerary blends luxury, authenticity and adventure as guests drift through the pristine Bai Tu Long Bay on a two-night Heritage Cruise, discover Hanoi's vibrant food scene by vintage Vespa on a private evening tour, glide through Hoi An's tranquil countryside past rice paddies and traditional villages, and arrive at Angkor Wat at sunrise by Vespa for a peaceful, intimate experience before the crowds.

A 13-night trip is priced from £8,150pp based on two sharing a room, including international flights in business class, internal flights and transfers, accommodation and meals.  
**Tropical Sky (01342 310571, www.tropicalsky.co.uk)**

**Shin-Kurayama Asama Shrine, Japan**  
Located in the Fuji Five Lakes region, on Lake Kawaguchiko, Hanz Outdoor Resort offers an escape for nature and culture enthusiasts. Guests can immerse themselves in the essence of Japanese culture, keeping abreast of the latest events and festivities, from traditional ceremonies to cultural showcases. Accommodation at Hanz Outdoor Resort start from 32,128 Yen/£176 for two people, per night on a room-only basis.  
**www.hanz-odr.com**

**Stira Bay Beach Club, Greece**  
Stira Bay is tucked away on the Western coast of Evia Island and is not as well known as some of the other hotspots in Greece.

The offer is for seven nights, including all breakfasts and three evening meals.

Activities include unlimited water sports, group tuition sessions, kids activity sessions, yoga, fitness classes, tennis and mountain biking.

All rooms have air con and there is plenty of shade around the infinity pool, beach and beach bar area too. The rooms have full sea views.

Price start from £890 per person based on a family of four in a family room. Flights from £165 return.

They are also offering £200 off per family for summer school holidays – code: Beach26  
**www.beyondbeach.com/beach/greece/evia/stira-bay**

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# TRAVFI

## France with Thomas Hawkins



The girls and their mum on a family-friendly slope.

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Sainte-Foy were battling against some not inconsiderable pressure to make the resort a reality, they had a saying: "Sainte-Foy, j'y crois". It translates as I believe in Sainte-Foy.

Turns out they were right to believe. Today, Sainte-Foy is a quintessential Alpine ski resort that feels easy and accessible with great foodie options while retaining a feeling of heritage and rural simplicity.

Our accommodation is a case in point. Le Ruitor CGH Residence sits at the end of a snow-lined street on the edge of the resort.

We found Le Ruitor with the help of Peak Retreats, the award-winning ski tour operator specialising in the French Alps. This is the second time I have used Peak Retreats, and they have once again found the perfect family-friendly accommodation for us.

From the outside, it looks like the chalet building has been here forever, but inside the stylish wood and stone design makes it look at once traditional and thoroughly modern. The rooms are large and warm with spectacular views out to the mountains while underfloor heating makes it a decadent retreat from the elements.

We settle into a daily routine of ordering fresh bread and croissants from the bakery, which are delivered to our chalet door every morning.

Back at the centre of the resort, we find a plentiful selection of restaurants and cafes. One of the best things about Sainte-Foy is its compact nature, meaning everything is within easy walking distance.

At the foot of the ski lifts, we stop at Llama Llama restaurant, whose British owner Rachael explains the appeal of Sainte-Foy.

"I used to have a place in Chamonix, but Chamonix is just so massive that you can feel a little lost in the crowd," she says.

Llama Llama is certainly not lost here, as the place is packed with families enjoying favourites like hot dogs and burgers in the sun. It is positioned directly in front of the ski school drop-off point, making it a great spot to grab a midday snack before heading

back into the mountains. Sainte-Foy, sandwiched between the major resorts of Tignes, Les Arcs and La Rosiere, offers a more laid-back ski holiday and we spend a day swishing in and out of the trees on peaceful slopes as a family. And it's not just skiing. Here in Sainte-Foy we see many people snowshoeing through the fairytale landscape of trees with high mountain views.

We stop mid-piste and unclip from our skis to try one of the other non-ski activities: husky sledding.

We wait for a few moments in the dappled light of the forest before the sled, guided by musher Thomas, comes sliding around the corner. There are eight huskies and, to complete the Alpine look, a St Bernard who gleefully chases the other dogs up the mountain.

We whizz through the trees, catching glimpses of the sunlit mountains beyond. It's an archetypal Alpine experience and one the children especially love.

Back on our skis and we discover another major bonus of Sainte-Foy – that all routes lead back to the centre of the resort. We happily split off to take different pistes, knowing we will all end up at the same place.

We finish the day at St Germain restaurant, just a few short steps from the snow front. Here the vibe is relaxed apres-ski and the tiny restaurant soon fills up. At the bar, people enjoy a glass of wine as the smell of cooking drifts from the kitchen.

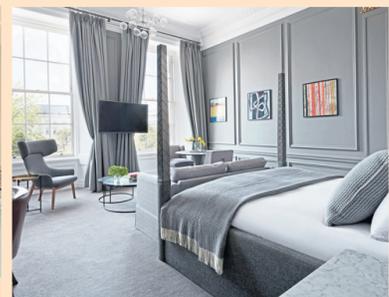
The restaurant specialises in local ingredients and the food is fantastic. The classic Savoyarde fondue is an absolute must – but make sure to book as it is very popular.

Back at Le Ruitor, we retreat to the chalet's indoor pool and spa to unwind and soothe aching muscles.

Sainte-Foy, j'y crois, they said. In Sainte-Foy, I believe I have found something special.

## TRAVEL FACTS

For accommodation in the French Alps, visit the award-winning Peak Retreats at [www.peakretreats.co.uk](http://www.peakretreats.co.uk). For more information on Sainte-Foy-Tarentaise, visit [www.saintefoy-tarentaise.com/en](http://www.saintefoy-tarentaise.com/en)



## Kimpton Blythswood Square with Lauren Robertson

### Hotel's luxury provides warm embrace in the chill of winter

If a snow shower doesn't wake you up on a Saturday morning, then I don't know what will. On any other day, the idea of stepping from my nice cosy house out into the snow would be an absolute no. But for some reason, when in a fancy spa and sweating post-sauna, it just feels right.

I had stayed at Kimpton Blythswood Square Hotel & Spa once before when I took my partner Aidan – and he had been begging me to do so ever since hearing about my first experience in the spa. The whole place is a labyrinth, but in the most relaxing way possible. You can take a dip in the pool – enjoying seaside

sounds and projections on the wall – before cooling off in the salt room. Heat back up in the sauna before relaxing in the tepidarium, then leave truly awake after a refreshing snow shower.

Our morning in the spa came after a glorious evening in the hotel. We arrived on a Friday evening to a bustling lobby, the concierge handing out glasses of wine for the daily 4-5pm 'social hour'. After a brief glimpse into iasg (pronounced ee-usk) restaurant where we'd be dining later and a quick marvel at the glistening chandelier that stretches up through the storeys, we headed to our room.

The rooms at Kimpton Blythswood Square are a kind of understated luxury,

with muted colours, heavy curtains and squishy cushions invoking an instant calm. The luxury is a tad less understated in the black marble bathrooms, their huge baths and sprawling vanity areas like something from a Pinterest board. The wide rainfall shower had Aidan declaring he never wanted to use our inferior one at home ever again. I can only hope he doesn't stick to this.

I had a quick lunch at the iasg the last time I was there, but was excited to have all the time in the world to enjoy dinner on this visit. The restaurant itself is a huge open space with high ceilings, a funky teal tiled 360 bar at its heart. There are plenty of tables and booths along the

## TRAVEL FACTS

Rooms start from £180. The Square Deal is currently running until March 31 (excluding Feb 15). This includes an overnight stay for two at Kimpton Blythswood Square Hotel & Spa, a two-course dinner at iasg, hotel guest access to the thermal experience (at designated hours), a bottle of prosecco, and a full Scottish breakfast ahead of check out the following morning. £249 Sunday-Thursday, £299 Friday.

Find out more at [kimptonblythswoodsquare.com](http://kimptonblythswoodsquare.com)

Clockwise from main: the impressive iasg restaurant; the lobby; a relaxing drink; the garden view suite; a look inside the incredible spa.

edges, but it didn't feel busy or loud, even on what we had been told was a fully-booked Friday night in the hotel.

Both Aidan and I are cocktail people, so we were thrilled to see not only the classics on offer but a whole menu of in-house creations. I started out with a twist on a martini while he had a cucumber and elderflower concoction, both of which were delicious.

Onto the food, iasg is first and foremost a seafood restaurant, but we both felt drawn to meat dishes. I had the roasted poussin with grilled hispi cabbage, nduja and confit garlic and Aidan ordered the Scottish venison with blackberry and juniper crust, smoked blackberry compote, king oyster and a spiced jus.

Everything was cooked to perfection, and you could tell the ingredients were fresh and local. The portions are small, but that is nothing a side order of the crispy fried potatoes with sesame and dashi mayonnaise can't fix. We ordered a second cocktail along with desserts; a pistachio and apple choux bun for me and a chocolate crèmeux for Aidan.

In what turned out to be a very happy accident, we were staying at Kimpton Blythswood Square on the night of The Traitors final. We would usually have watched this gripping the edge of the sofa at home, likely with a rushed dinner balanced on our laps, so it's safe to say watching it sprawled out in a huge bed with full bellies was a real treat.

After the soundest of sleeps, we headed down for an early breakfast to beat the morning rush. It was back to iasg, which we were chuffed about, and we were also chuffed with the lemon and ginger shots we were handed upon arrival. A lovely touch.

I am not the biggest breakfast fan and always prefer to pick away at yogurt and fruit from the buffet than I do to sit down to a full meal. Luckily, there were plenty of options for me, and Aidan was equally impressed by the hot breakfast menu. He ordered a giant pancake stack – when in Rome – topped with a vanilla cream and berries and positively oozing syrup.

The early breakfast paid off, because by the time we headed to the spa, most had finished their early morning dip and were leaving in search of food. I would absolutely recommend planning your morning like this because we had the spa almost to ourselves. With checkout looming, we soaked up every possible minute of swimming, lounging, snow showering and sauna-ing.

There are plenty of cheaper hotel options in Glasgow that will do the job for a place to rest your head. But if you want something more, a little bubble of luxury and calm in the bustling city centre, or even a retreat for cocktails and nibbles with friends, Kimpton Blythswood Square is your oasis.

# My Scotland

Top harbour towns with Scottish songwriter Lou Mclean.



## Dunbar

I think of Dunbar as being somewhere filled with silly memories. I've spent lots of time learning to surf at Belhaven bay and munching the mussels at The Creel Restaurant. I love wild camping and just enjoying long summer nights by the shore.

## Newhaven



The women of Newhaven worked and sang together in their choir and operated a matriarchal community. The way they lived resonated so much with my own social circle that I wrote a song dedicated to female friendship.



## Kirkcudbright

I was born and raised here. I like wandering around the (many) art galleries, having a pint in the Masonic and spending time looking at the sunsets and stars. If you know where to look, there are many secluded beaches for swimming. I'm really excited to play my first hometown show soon.

Lou's Outline of a Girl is out now. Find out more at [www.loumclean.com](http://www.loumclean.com)