



**THE ROND POINT** (call it 'the Ronnie' to sound like a seasonaire), just below the Rhodos gondola's mid-station, is the classic après spot, and it gets pretty full-on. Old, young, and pint-sized get involved with the ski-boot dancing to local bands and, once the toffee vodkas start going down, there's generally a bit of crowd-surfing. You can catch a bus from here into the town, often advisable after a few drinks, but plenty of people choose to play 'dodge the piste basher' in the dark on the Doron run down.

**BACK IN 2006, GAME LONDON GALS PHILIPPA EYLES AND HOLLY FISHER SET UP THE GOURMET CHALET COMPANY FISH AND PIPS IN MÉRIBEL. POISED FOR THEIR FOURTH SEASON, THEY PRESENT THEIR INSIDERS' GUIDE TO THE LIP-SMACKING SNACKING, BOOZY BARS AND WORLD-CLASS SLOPES THEY CALL THE OFFICE**



Although we (Pippa on the right, Holly on the left) have both skied together on joint family holidays since we were knee-high, we'd never skied here when we decided it was the right place to set up shop. Méribel's got the lot, from great dining to lively nightlife. And it doesn't hurt that it's slap-bang in the middle of the world's biggest ski area either.

**LINKING MÉRIBEL TO SWANKY COURCHEVEL,** La Tania and the high-altitude resorts Val Thorens and Les Menuires, the 3 Valleys ski area is ginormous, endlessly varied, and you can ski for days on end without ever doing the same run twice. Plus the lift system and snowmaking are state-of-the-art, so you can cover loads of ground right up till the end of season. Of the many highlights, the long, wide, rolling red Jerusalem run, which takes you from the top of the Tougnette lift down to the old village of St Martin de Belleville, is our idea of piste-skiing perfection.

**WHEN WE FIRST STARTED LOOKING** for chalets to hire, we were so young it took a while for us to be taken seriously. But we've always found Méribel incredibly friendly. Its big community of seasonaires, mainly British with a sprinkling of Aussies and Kiwis, is really welcoming, and we put down roots straight away. Our staff have become almost like a big family, too. Fishstock, our end-of-season party for suppliers and staff and friends, has become an institution, usually rocked by the local band Bring Your Sister. And in April we had our first Hag do – a combined Hen and Stag do – for Alice, one of our chefs, and Marky, our resort driver, and we all went skiing in full costume.



**ALICE AND MARKY GOT MARRIED** in Méribel too, on the terrace of one of our chalets, with marquees, a bar around the hot tub, a cake made of local cheese, and our favourite local live band Bring Your Sisters. It was fantastic. The bride and groom wrote their own, very sweet vows, which included 'I promise to make you a coffee every morning, just the way you like it.' We were both in floods.

**BY 11AM, YOU CAN FORGET ABOUT IT.** But around 9am, when it's freshly groomed and drenched in morning sunshine, the Creux run, dropping down from the Saulire over to Courchevel, is divine. It's worth getting up half an hour earlier to be the first up there, before the crowds and the sun start turning it into a mushy motorway.



**When the weather's rubbish,** we head for La Tania between Méribel and Courchevel, down mountain, as it's in the trees, so visibility is always better there. It also has the major bonus of Roc Tania, one of our favourite places to eat. It's nothing fancy, but the steak is great, the prawns delicious and the kebabs to die for. When the weather's good, the terrace catches the last of the day's sun, too. Pippa's family from Kent, pictured here, who stay with us every year, take us out for lunch there, which inevitably involves much rosé, toffee vodka, the mountain liqueur génépi and Irish coffees.

**THE 3 VALLEYS' OFF PISTE IS LEGENDARY,** and on Holly's birthday last April we went on an epic mission with a guide, with climbing harnesses, ice picks and all the gear. We skied up to Val Thorens, took lifts up as high as you can go, then ski-toured and climbed to the top of the Gebroulaz glacier, then skied thigh-deep powder down through the crevasses. We had to ski over a crevasse bridge at one point, which was a bit spooky. 'Ski straight over,' said the guide, helpfully. 'Don't fall.' Even in late April there's good snow, and you also see the little shoots of wild flowers poking through, and marmots and chamois coming out for the spring. We, bedraggled, sweaty messes, finally made it to our lunch destination, the Refuge du Roc de la Pêche, at 4pm and got stuck into a massive cheesy, potatoe-y carb-fest and Champagne.

This place is a true hidden gem with fantastic rustic mountain food and a gorgeous, massive St Bernard in permanent residence.



**Getting there:** Nearest airports are Chambéry, Grenoble, Lyon and Geneva, 90 mins, 2hrs 15, 2hrs 30 and 2hrs 45 away by road respectively. Swiss (swiss.com) and Bmibaby (bmibaby.com) fly to Geneva, British Airways (ba.com) flies to Geneva and Lyon, EasyJet (easyjet.com) flies to Geneva, Lyon and Grenoble, Ryanair (ryanair.com) flies to Grenoble and Jet2.com flies to Geneva and Chambéry. Altibus (altibus.com) runs coach transfers from these airports. Eurostar (eurostar.com) runs from London to Moutiers, 18km away

**TOUR OPERATORS:** High-end: Scott Dunn (scottdunn.com), Elegant Resorts (elegantresorts.co.uk) Mid-range: Mark Warner (markwarner.co.uk), Erna Low (ernalow.co.uk) Budget: First Choice (firstchoice-ski.co.uk)

The following details apply to Méribel (M) and the 3 Valleys (3V)  
**Season dates:** 12 Dec – 19 Apr  
**Vertical drop:** (M) 2,950 – 1,400m, (3V) 3,230 – 1,260m  
**Terrain:** (M) 150km, (3V) 600km  
**Pistes:** M and 3V

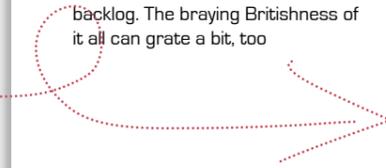


**Snowmaking:** (M) 42% coverage, (3V) 33%  
**Lift passes:** (M) 1-day €39, 6-day €187, (3V) 1-day €46.50, 6-day €232

**Mountain munchies:** Surprisingly few and undistinguished. You're better off skiing back to town.  
**Guiding:** ESF (esf-meribel.com) dominates, but there are several others, such as the excellent Parallel Lines (parallellines.com)  
**Snowpark:** the huge Moonpark has plenty of rails and kickers, and the new P'tit Moon is perfect for young 'uns and beginners

**Eating/drinking:** The legendary Dick's Tea Bar remains the messy night out of choice, but there are plenty of other boisterous bars and restaurants to sample

**Highlight:** the quantity and range of slopes, no question. On a good day, the 3 Vs can't be beat  
**Bummer:** queues. Despite Méribel's speedy and plentiful lifts, it still suffers from major human backlog. The braying Britishness of it all can grate a bit, too



Images: Victoria Spierforth, @MÉRIBEL\_TOURISME - Jean-Maurice Coueillard, Fish and Pips, shutterstock.com



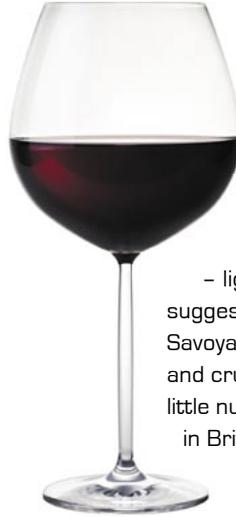
When we got back to Les Allues, the village 300m below Méribel where we live, Holly refused to take her harness off in La Tsaretta bar where we went for their fantastic wood-fired pizzas because she thought she looked really hardcore. It kind of backfired, though, when Marky our resort driver got some rope, and when her back was turned clipped her in and had her literally swinging from the rafters. Very dignified.

**OUR SIX CHALETs** are all in Méribel Village, an area 1km up the road from the centre of town. Things can get pretty rowdy in Méribel itself, so it's nice to be able to retreat from it all when you're ready for some peace! The Village's one lift, the Golf, is rather handy too, as it means you can avoid the crush at the main La Chaudanne base area. And this



year the rather creaky old model here being 'worked on' by two nice young men, has been replaced with a nippy new high-speed lift. Handy.

**IN THE VILLAGE** the friendly little bakery Le Village des Pains, run by two local women, is well-known for the best pastries in the 3 Vallees and is a great coffee stop, plus it has a little deli counter with lovely ham and cheeses, chutneys and divine saucissons aux noisettes. The pizzas are great, too. Next door, the Lodge du Village is effectively the local pub for our guests and chalet staff. It's relaxed, but can get quite wild when one of the local bands plays. Early on, our fave Bring Your Sisters will be letting kids play drums and sing with them, while everyone's sipping their first demi fresh off the mountain. Two hours later it's mayhem – they like to bring the house down playing James's classic *Sit Down*. Which we all do, naturally, while singing at the top of our lungs.

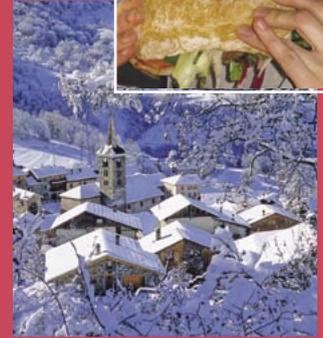


**IF YOU FANCY A CIVILISED GLASS** a step away from Méribel's famously lively bar scene, the Bar à Vin is a real find. Run by Mag, a lovely French lady, it has a great cellar and blackboards with recommended wines, or you can just tell Mag what you fancy – light, dry, fruity or rich – and she'll have a suggestion for you, plus yummy little assiettes of Savoyard cheeses, meats and crudités. It's a rare little nugget of real France in Brit-centric Méribel.



## LA VOUTE IN ST MARTIN DE BELLEVILLE

is brilliant for a lingering lunch. It's a good-long ski down there, and you're greeted with an authentic French mountain town with a lovely old stone church – light years from the flash and bustle of the 3 Valleys' big resorts. The unfussy food – a mix of classic Italian and French dishes – is good, portions huge and prices very reasonable. But the best bargain on the mountain is to be found at a little sandwich stall just steps from the lift at



Mottaret, which is infamous among seasonaires. Huge, tasty chicken and beef burgers, and local cheese and veggie sandwiches the size of your head, keep you going all afternoon for about €5.



**NOW THAT WE WORK** in Méribel, we see a side of it most guests don't – out of season. When we go there to prepare for the season, the valley is stunning in all its green glory – it looks like it's covered in broccoli! Then suddenly, within a few days, ridge lines of trees will turn red with the first frosts. It's very beautiful, and incredibly peaceful.

Affordable gourmet chalet company Fish and Pips ([fishandpips.com](http://fishandpips.com)) offers six fully catered and self-catering chalets in Méribel Village, all within 50m of the Golf chairlift. In response to guests' repeated requests, Holly and Philippa, both Cordon Bleu-trained, have compiled *Fish and Pips: The Cookbook*, which will be published next month. Details are at [fishandpips.com](http://fishandpips.com), or see the next issue of *Snow* and you could win a copy.