



Chalet Girls

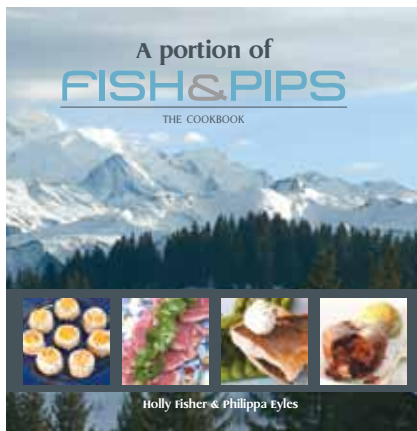
• Above (from left): Holly Fisher and Philippa Eyles.
 • Below: Fish & Pips' recipes for success

How Fish & Pips turned a warm welcome into hot property

In the action-man world of French skiing, a pair of – English! – women setting up a chalet company seemed unlikely. Not only have Holly Fisher and Philippa Eyles done exactly that, they confounded expectations by doing so in their early twenties.

Within six years, Fish & Pips – a play on their nicknames – has grown to include nine chalets in Méribel and Val d'Isère (close to Chambéry and Geneva airports), employing 45 staff during the winter season. “We never imagined that Fish & Pips would become a chalet company of this size, or that it would be known for offering the best to ski- and food-lovers without a price tag to match,” says Holly, who is based in Méribel, while business partner Philippa runs the financial operation from Devon.

The founding directors, who are childhood friends and keen skiers, were just a couple of years out of university when they decided to start their own business. With a passion for food and travel, the girls did a season working with Scott Dunn and a private chalet company to build up contacts with essential services. “Knowing who were the best butchers, bakers and ski schools was invaluable preparation



– and letting potential suppliers know that we were looking for suitable property was essential as it's so close-knit here,” says Holly. “Networking was how we got to know when a property became available.”

The duo launched their business in April 2006 with £15,000 savings (and no external investment since). It was an exciting and profitable time. “The exchange rate was 1.45 euros to £1. We had 92 per cent

bookings and guests were spending money on extras such as massages,” Holly recalls. “We thought no one could fail in this business.”

The following year they saw the exchange rate drop. “Our income was in pounds but our outgoings were in euros,” says Holly. “This meant a 30 per cent drop in revenue, which was huge for us as a small business.”

Yet their decision to keep their company at the affordable end of the sector paid off – especially as they chose properties close to the pistes, usually within skiing distance of the chairlift. “We don't have super-glam properties,” explains Holly, “but we like to think we've got the best locations and the best chefs.” Hence their continued success, with 10 per cent growth expected next year.

By hiring professional cooks – many of whom have worked for top restaurants – Fish & Pips have given themselves the edge in terms of high-quality meals and well-chosen wines. They've won the Times Chalet Chef 2010 award, and even brought out their own cookbook, *A Portion Of Fish & Pips* (£20). How they've managed to keep their feet on the ground at such lofty heights is another story. fishandpips.co.uk