



(Photo: Les 2 Alpes/Pyrène Duffau)

Bombing down an off-piste section of the French Alps called La Fée (the Fairy), it's as magical as the name suggests. The sun is shining, there's not a cloud in the sky and early in the season, the pistes of Les Deux Alpes are empty, despite being a hotspot for freeride skiing.

That I am skiing here at all at all seems like a miracle. It's the first time I have visited the French Alps in two years — and as fate would have it, after two glorious days, it comes to an abrupt end when French borders temporarily shut once more to British holidaymakers.

Now restrictions have lifted again, there's plenty of reason to make up for lost time and book a trip though. And even better, one of the new hotels in Les Deux Alpes means you can do it without spending a fortune or sacrificing too many luxuries. Base Camp Lodge bills itself as a budget hotel with a difference, so new that I'm told my bed has

never been slept in: the bedroom and en-suite bathroom are positively gleaming.

Set in the former Hotel des Champions, the building has been completely gutted and revamped, with 30 rooms of varying size designed to appeal to visitors looking for good quality affordable accommodation year-round – think mountain biking and hiking in summer, as well as for skiers and snowboarders in winter.

Just five minutes' walk from the ski lifts, it sits smack bang in the centre of the village and the ski rental shops: for people who hate walking in ski boots carrying skis, the hotel couldn't be better placed.



Bedroom at Base Camp Lodge (Photo: ManuReyboz)

There's a youthful vibe, right from the welcoming fire pit burning on the sundeck at the front of the hotel. A resident DJ gets people in the mood for après-ski after a long day on the slopes and, with its bright

colours and steel and wood design, the hotel has a trendy, upbeat feel.

Inside, there are dormitory-style rooms with bunk beds for up to 10 people, aimed at groups of friends, several families or even solo skiers, as well as private rooms for two. The décor is fun with a modern twist on Alpine design; you'll find mountain-shaped wood panelling on the bedroom walls and floor-to-ceiling landscape pictures.

Bedside lamps are in the shape of fir trees, the lightshades are mini cable cars. Each bedroom has an en-suite bathroom and a large flat screen TV with satellite channels, plus there's also free wifi.

The dormitories have a kitchenette, with personal lockers for valuables. At present, these rooms can only be booked by groups rather than individuals, although in future, solo travellers will be able to cut costs by choosing a bed in these mixed dorms.

My own room, ideal for a large family or group of friends, is spacious and airy: the big double bedroom has an en-suite shower plus there's a separate room with a sofa bed and a south-facing terrace balcony looking out onto views of the mountains. Other features in the hotel include a sauna and fitness room and a ski room with heated ski boot racks, proving budget doesn't have to equal basic.

“The idea behind Base Camp is a new concept of hospitality, something between a hostel and a hotel,” explains director Geoffrey Obry. “We want people to meet and mix, and we offer rooms to meet every request: dorms, rooms, family rooms, suites. The restaurant offers a wide variety of drinks and food to cater for every budget.”

Breakfast itself is a hot and cold buffet, with a range of sweet and savoury options to pick from. To refuel at the end of the day, you can tuck into a three-course evening meal with a choice of starter, main and dessert, including vegan and vegetarian options as well as traditional mountain fare.



(Photo: Les 2 Alpes/Luka Leroy)

During my stay, the resort's annual [Rise Festival](#) is taking place—motto 'party on top of the world' — and the live music is already pumping from the stage at the foot of the slopes as neon strobe lights flicker.

With more than 5,000 attendees at the week-long party, especially students, 2022's event is scheduled for December 10-17. And with its budget-friendly price tag of £250 covering tickets and six-day lift pass, it makes sense there should be equally affordable accommodation.

In the morning the ever-helpful receptionist asks me if the music kept me awake but I assure her that I had a great night's sleep even though my room overlooks the main street. One of the reasons I slept so well, apart from the sound-proof windows, was having started my stay in the resort with an hour's snow e-biking session with [Aventure Electrobike](#).

More experienced cyclists can enjoy a challenging 400m vertical climb or even night-time rides including an evening meal on the summit but I settle for the one-hour introductory lesson. It's still great fun and once I have mastered the different power settings and selected the right gears, I am soon whizzing up the piste with my instructor Antoine as dusk falls in the mountains.

Topping out at 3,600m, Les Deux Alpes is the highest ski resort in France, home to Europe's largest skiable glacier, which means you can ski year-round, even in a T-shirt and shorts in summer. Founded in 1946 at the point where the northern and southern Alps meet, it's just over an hour's drive from Grenoble, so closer to an airport than the Trois Vallées resorts, for example.

One of the more unusual features of Les Deux Alpes is that it is an "upside down" resort. The higher you go towards the peak, the easier the runs, with the lower-placed learner slopes for beginners up top with the glacier. Some 60 per cent of the runs are aimed at beginners and intermediates, while its eight square kilometre off-piste freeride area and snowparks make it popular with both snowboarders and freestyle skiers.



Le Diable au Coeur (Photo: Les 2 Alpes/Le Diable au Coeur)

Swapping the e-bike for skis, my instructor Yannick kicks off our day with a visit to the glacier: the spectacular views from the very top ski lift, Dôme de la Lauze, are my favourite spot. We visit the Belvédère des Ecrins viewing platform for a heart-stopping view over the Ecrins mountains and the 1,000m drop into the abyss above the Vallon de la Selle below — a unique sight that non-skiers don't have to miss, it's accessible to pedestrians from the top of the funicular station. Don't miss the Grotte de Glace ice cave either; the ice sculptures of famous faces, animals and Disney characters in the 1,000-year-old ice are wonderful.

We stop for lunch at Le Diable au Coeur; far from being devilish, it's a cosy wood and stone chalet on the piste at 2,400m with an open fire inside. The enormous sun deck has views to die for and the food is delicious, serving local specialities such as grilled Vercors trout from

the mountain streams. It also brews its own beer, La Bière des Glaciers.

Basking in the warm sun, it's very easy for lunch to turn into a two-hour session while watching the more hard-core skiers speeding down the black run. But if you still find yourself here come happy hour, with live music from 3-4pm, you can always jump on the new Diable chair lift home — a devil-may-care end to the day indeed.

Getting There

Flights to Grenoble cost from £16 return with Wizz Air from Luton, £48 with easyJet from Gatwick and £21 with Ryanair from Manchester.

Rooms at Base Camp Lodge cost from £29 per person for dormitory beds, from £79 for two-person rooms.

For more information, visit leszalpes.com

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