

DRIVE A SKI BARGAIN!

Hitting the slopes with children is never cheap. But go by car to this French resort and you'll save a small fortune

M'AIDEZ! M'aidiez!' Deranged with panic, I flapped my arms and hollered for help. No ski trip for my family is complete without the international phrase for emergency being used at least once.

Only this time I wasn't shouting it from a slope-side collision but from the hard shoulder of a French motorway after coming to a juddering halt an hour north of Dijon. We were out of petrol.

And were it not for a passing motorway maintenance man who calmly directed us to an SOS phone box, muttering 'Les Anglais', as he got us on our way again, we might never have discovered the simple joys of one of France's best-kept family ski secrets, Le Grand Bornand.

Situated in the Aravis mountain range between Annecy, Chamonix and Geneva, Le Grand Bornand is quieter and less well known than its flashier neighbours.

But its Savoyard charm — tinkling cowbells not nightclub tinnituss — draws French families year after year and was the perfect balm to our shattered nerves.

Separated into two villages — Grand Bornand at 1,000 metres, and Chinailon at 1,300 metres — we made the higher resort our base during our Easter break

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Picture: ALAMY

Mountains of fun: Le Grand Bornand in the Alps. Inset: Fiona Hardcastle's family

up the majority of its 90km of pistes, Le Grand Bornand is a reassuring resort where a woman who skis slower with every passing year can find what remains of her bottle.

The lack of daredevil snowboarders also makes it perfect for the children. Rose, 14, and Evie, 12, were soon swooshing past, while beginner Felix, seven, excelled as a flocon — the only time I will ever proudly call him a snowflake.

else would do the cooking. Thank goodness then for Huski, a take-away service offering the broadest of comfort foods delivered directly to your chalet. Beef bourguignon and mash? Or chicken korma and a couple of beers?

Be sure to specify your delivery slot well in advance of when you want to eat, or you'll be glaring at the microwave way past bedtime. It wouldn't be a skiing holiday, though, without a near-death

before heading home was a pit-stop in Chambéry at Chateau Candie, a glorious pile where we drank in the views of the Savoie landscape with a glass of the hotel's own Viognier.

All that was left was to fill up the car and begin the eight-hour drive back to the Eurotunnel, eyes now firmly locked on the fuel gauge.

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Separated into two villages — Grand Bornand at 1,000 metres, and Chinallon at 1,300 metres — we made the higher resort our base during our Easter break, quickly settling into Le Village de Lessy, a series of spacious and comfortable self-catering apartments, the thoughtful layout of which minimises the unholy mess made by a family of five.

Our Eurotunnel tickets plus return fuel costs meant travel for five came to about £470 while easyJet flights to Geneva during the Easter holidays would have set us back around £1,400 with car hire.

Ski lockers in the basement of

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AND if the 16 reds and four blacks aren't quite enough for advanced skiers such as my husband, they can jump on to the shuttle bus to the neighbouring resort of La Clusaz, and exhaust themselves on more challenging terrain.

Self-catering always sounds sensible when you're counting the pennies. Less so when you're staring into a sink wishing someone

else would do the cooking. Thank goodness then for Huski, a take-away service offering the broadest of comfort foods delivered directly to your chalet. Beef bourguignon and mash? Or chicken korma and a couple of beers?

Be sure to specify your delivery slot well in advance of when you want to eat, or you'll be glaring at the microwave way past bedtime. It wouldn't be a skiing holiday, though, without a near-death experience with cheese.

And there are few better places for a full immersion than Le Jalouvre, the warmest of restaurants providing a delicious nightly dilemma. Would *madame* care to drown by fondue or raclette?

Five days on the slopes are always enough, so having returned our skis — and offered up silent thanks for no broken bones — we ventured to Annecy, where its magnificent lake and medieval town held us in wonder.

Our final night of indulgence

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TRAVEL FACTS

FIONA and her family travelled with Peak Retreats (peakretreats.co.uk) to Village de Lessy in Le Grand Bornand. Seven nights' self-catered from £239pp including return Eurotunnel crossing with free upgrade to Flexiplus on most dates. Rooms at Chateau de Candie in Chambéry from £90pp per night. Visit annecy.mountains.com



by FIONA HARDCASTLE

our apartment were easy enough to manage, once we'd cracked the labyrinthine lifts. Hauling the kids' clobber, and your own, up a steep incline to the ski school meeting point, less so.

Day two and we joined the dots. Why drive the car 700 miles only to let it stand idle for the week for fear of losing your parking space? Cranking the gear into the boot, we drove right up to the chairlift and parked in its shadow.

Children finally fully dressed and dispatched to their instructors, it was time to face my own mountain demons. A shambolic skier, my limited abilities have dwindled even more since having children.

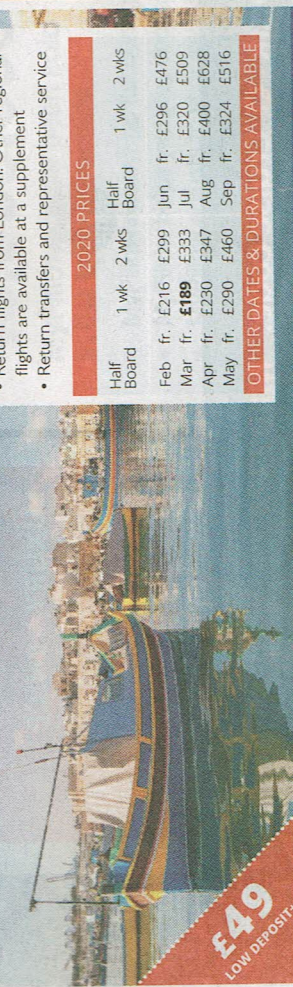
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*Mercury Holidays discounts on 01/07/2020. Please note availability is limited for our land-in from prices. Prices were accurately quoted on 11/07/2020 & are subject to change since going to print due to airline availability. All offers are subject to availability & can be withdrawn without notice. Terms & conditions apply. An additional cost for hand luggage will apply. Prices are per person sharing. Our hotel costs will not change. Week-Weeks, Fr-Fri & Wed-Fri. Additional £20pp required a week after booking. See website for details. Terms & conditions apply. TripAdvisor rating as of 11/07/2020.

4★ CANIFOR HOTEL

This popular hotel is located just a few minutes from the attractive Qawra promenade.

INCLUDED IN THE PRICE:

- Breakfast and dinner daily or upgrade to All-Inclusive from £11 per person daily
- Air-conditioned/heated en suite room with a balcony
- Return flights from London. Other regional flights are available at a supplement
- Return transfers and representative service

2020 PRICES

| Half Board | 1 wk | 2 wks | Half Board | 1 wk | 2 wks | | |
|------------|------|-------|------------|------|-------|------|------|
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| Mar | fr. | £189 | £333 | Jul | fr. | £320 | £509 |
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| May | fr. | £290 | £460 | Sep | fr. | £324 | £516 |

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