



A Luxury Chalet Experience

Andy Castle, Founder of two of the most recognised and reputable luxury ski agencies in the world, Ski In Luxury and Ultimate Luxury Chalets, is here to give us the low down on his thoughts and feelings on the industry development, along with some of the key movers and shakers for this coming winter

The majority of ski goers report chalets to be overwhelmingly more inviting than a hotel, and there's good reason for. Across Europe, you can get some very affordable and ultra luxurious chalets to stay in; some self catered and others catered for ease.

This opens up the realms of imagination when it comes to thinking of your ideal ski break – dream your perfect chalet with opulent alpine furnishings, spectacular spa

facilities, gourmet food on offer, expert professional staff on hand, a roaring fire with a fur rug in the front room, and a spectacular view over whichever mountain range you choose. This may sound like a far-fetched dream, but it can be your reality very easily – luxury ski chalets seem to reach a whole new level of opulence and grandeur, as well as amaze with each and every ski season.

When I first launched Ski In Luxury in 2005 a luxury ski chalet could be classified as such if the property had fully en-suite bedrooms. Nowadays there is a whole new benchmark being set season after season that now provide guests of the most sought after luxury ski resorts in the Alps with a whole new level of sumptuousness. Private swimming pools, hot tubs, massage and wellness centres, and extravagant



home cinemas are now a standard wish list inclusion of our discerning clients. It seems that in the key resorts of Courchevel, Megeve, Val d'Isere, Verbier and Zermatt, new chalets are popping up each year that simply try to out-do the older chalets by offering more lavish facilities and much larger living spaces. In Courchevel for example, the previous "top dog" in terms of size was the vast Chalet Edelweiss at 3,000m². This season sees the introduction of the Chalet Ageopka, a chalet that will span 4,000m² and include a 26m swimming pool, an additional indoor/outdoor swimming pool in the master bedroom, and a plethora of facilities even including a golf driving range! Things just got silly!!

Although a number of international

markets are down in their touristic visits of resorts such as Courchevel, particularly on the Russian side, there is a new wave of visitors with a huge demand for the resort coming from the United Arab Emirates and South America. The lure of Courchevel is obvious: pristine piste maintenance, a vast ski area covering approx. 600km of runs, a huge choice of pistes offering great skiing for all abilities and with plenty of opportunities for beginners and early-intermediates to learn or to master their parallel turns. Couple these ski related pluses with the fact that the Three Valleys is now home to 12 Michelin starred restaurants, and shopping boutiques in Courchevel offering all of the latest ranges from Fendi, Gucci, Chanel, Boppre,

Mosler and many more, it is easy to see why Courchevel still remains the number one ski destination in many people's eyes.

When discussing the best properties available to rent in Courchevel we would without doubt have to include the aforementioned Chalet Edelweiss, spread over 6 levels and with 8 luxuriously appointed bedrooms. The chalet has a huge area dedicated to wellness with a 13m pool, hot tub, sauna, jacuzzi and a superbly equipped gym. For those that like to entertain or simply want to carry on partying after the nightclubs in resort close their doors for the night, there is even an in-house personal nightclub with DJ booth!

A personal favourite in our portfolio has to be the Chalet White Dream. Intriguingly



finished and white washed, the chalet gives off an aura that encourages you to believe that you are staying in a fairytale chalet, tucked away in your own winter wonderland. It's not the largest or the most grand chalet in Courchevel but it offers a charming location for its guests to enjoy a celebration or gathering of friends and family in the mountains.

A resort that has in the past 5 or so years seen more chalet development and additions to the rental market than any other is Verbier. Located in the 4 Valées ski region of Switzerland, Verbier is easily accessible from the private

airport of Sion and just a couple of hours' transfer from Geneva. It is very much one of the most sought after destinations for corporate groups looking to take their clients or staff on rewarding breaks for their ongoing business, or for team building.

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Verbier is home to some stunning ski chalets, with the largest on the rental market being the Chalet Truffe Blanche, spanning 3,000m². The chalet has not one but 9 treatment rooms dedicated to pampering the 18 guests that it can occupy. Chalet Truffe Blanche's entertainment on offer is so vast that you will struggle to comprehend finding the time

to head out onto the mountain. The chalet features a state-of-the-art private cinema, a wash and vodka bar, chic private nightclub, pool table, an impressive wine cellar, and a huge private gymnasium, all topped off with a 15m indoor swimming pool, a Turkish hammam and an authentic Finnish sauna!

As Verbier is such a desired corporate destination, over recent years there has been a significant increase in properties set up to cater for these company groups and to establish themselves as the coolest chalet for clients to be "wowed". The Chalet No. 14 is one of the undoubted contenders for this mantle, equipped with 13 bedrooms sleeping a total of 26 guests. The chalet is, as standard, equipped with a 16m indoor pool, a wonderfully cosy cinema, indoor and outdoor hot tubs, and offering a team of 16 dedicated staff who will wait on the guests and address their every whim.

Then there comes the choice of those

looking for a more discreet location, one of the most charming and authentic ski resorts in the Alps. Where fine dining and boutique shopping are in abundance, and with a refined elegance that captivates its visitors. We are talking obviously about the resort of Megève, just an hours' transfer from Geneva airport.

Megève has always been a complicated resort for us to establish ourselves in due to the vast number of in-resort agencies who all seem to deal with the same properties but with each of them calling the chalets a different name! It was a resort that we avoided including too significantly in our portfolios but without doubt now it's a hard resort to ignore! The standard of chalets in the resort rivals any other in Europe, and this season has seen a barrage of new properties being constructed and brought onto the rental market.

Two of the most impressive newcomers to

our portfolio are the incredibly extravagant but still somewhat understated Chalet Opulence (how very aptly named!) and the Chalet Ma Dutcha.

Opulence is situated on the legendary Rothchild hillside of Mont d'Arbois with stunning views of the surrounding mountains of Megève. It spans 1,350m² of living space and sleeps up to 26 guests in unreserved luxury. As with all of the top-end chalets the obvious inclusions are the indoor swimming pool, hot tub, steam room, private nightclub and cinema. The chalet's attention to detail is impeccable and it is most definitely one of my top 10 chalets in our ever expanding collection.

The Chalet Ma Dutcha holds a location that is very hard to find and impossible to beat in Megève. Being a free standing chalet sleeping up to 14 people in 7 bedrooms, the chalet is situated just a short stroll from the centre of Megève and the central lift station

of Rochebrune. The chalet has a picture postcard outdoor swimming pool with neighbouring hot tub on the vast terrace. Inside it oozes sophisticated luxury yet with a very traditionally styled décor. The chalet will be a very popular destination amongst our clients for the 2016 season.

Quite simply, I could go on and on about the wonderful chalets that are on offer in the Alps but it's a case of where do I stop? The Ultimate Luxury Chalets website features our top 100 properties taken from our Ski in Luxury portfolio, changing each season to incorporate the latest and greatest chalets coming onto the rental market. We provide our clients with an unbiased opinion and search facility to help them to find the best luxury ski holiday solution for their needs.

We are always available to chat through your plans on +44 (0)1282 283653 or drop us an email to ask@ultimateluxurychalets.com