

Courchevel - 3 Valleys, France

Courchevel lies at the heart of the Three Valleys and is one of most famous resorts and most prestigious winter sports resorts in the world. It owes its reputation to its great hotel services and gastronomic restaurants. This makes it the most expensive resort in the French Alps! It is one of the older French ski resorts. Most of the development took place in the 1940's. It consists of four villages spread up the mountain - Courchevel 1300 (known as Le Praz), and Courchevel 1550, 1650 and 1850. All five areas are linked by a frequent bus service and obviously by the pistes.

1850 is the largest of the villages and is the main resort of the complex, with the most nightlife, best off-piste facilities and an elaborate ski-lift system. The immediate impression of 1850 is that it is not as upmarket as it's made out to be. You can pay through the nose to eat, drink and stay and it is notably very cosmopolitan. There are some top-class hotels, many haute cuisine restaurants (including two with Michelin stars) and some exclusive nightclubs with top acts. Affordable places are difficult but not impossible to find.

1650 has some quietly situated traditional chalets but is dominated by large apartment blocks. The main road cuts through 1650 but there is also an old village centre with some lively bars.

1550 is a calm village, with cheaper accommodation and restaurants than 1850. 1850 is a gondola ride away but a long trip to 1850 by road if you are intending to go there in the evenings. It is well suited to families.

Le Praz (Courchevel 1300) is the oldest part of Courchevel and home to the Olympic ski jump from the winter games of 1992. It is a picturesque village, with a backdrop of woodlands. There is a handful of convenient restaurants and bars but it is not to be compared with 1850. Le Praz is suitable for families.

Courchevel is perfectly adapted to all levels of skier. Le Praz is best for experts and 1650 best for beginners. The maintenance of the ski area is commendable.

Snow cover is more or less guaranteed from the start to the finish of the Winter season due to the north facing slopes and more than 500 snow canons. There are two major types of lift pass - the Vallée de Courchevel 160 km and the Three Valleys - 600km of pistes. Of all the resorts in the three Valleys Courchevel is the most varied sector of the Three Valleys and you may find you have no need to leave the immediate area. If you do remember, as with the other resorts in the three valleys, with such large skiing terrain, you have to be sure you are back on the correct side of the valley before the lifts shut to avoid having to hitch a ride or pay an extortionate taxi fare! Courchevel is attractive for boarders. Check out the snowboard meeting place and Internet bar and shop in 1850 'Prends ta luge et tire toi'

