

FROM STATION TO SLOPE

Skiers fed up with flying are taking to overland travel, says **Liz Rowlinson**

After a cracking season in the Alps last year, those of us mad for the white stuff are dusting off the ski boots and hoping for more of the same.

Yet anyone caught up in the week-long disruption to flights caused by the Icelandic volcanic ash last April could well be planning on taking Eurostar or the car instead.

"We've found that all the misery caused by ash and BA strikes at the end of last season has led to an increase in self-drive bookings," says Joanna Yellowlees-Bound of ski company Erna Low. "New research by Icelandic volcanologists tells us to expect more intensified activity for decades to come."

Resorts in France's Savoie district are easiest to drive to in less than 10 hours, but you can also take the Eurostar straight into Bourg St Maurice, from which resorts are easily accessed by taxi, bus or funicular. Of course, some people, especially those with young children, prefer to take the car anyway, and Arc 1950 is a very family-friendly resort.

A seven-minute funicular ride from Bourg St Maurice, the purpose-built resort – part of the Les Arcs cluster of villages – is considered "Disney-like" by some; superbly user-friendly by others. Built by the Canadian developer IntraWest, the self-contained, car-free village links into the huge Paradiski ski

domain, suiting expert skiers and beginners alike.

The Wilks family from Maidenhead, Berkshire, always travel by train to their two-bedroom apartment in Arc 1950. After taking the Eurostar to Bourg St Maurice they take a 35-minute cab (€65) to the resort – 10 hours door-to-door.

"Our choice is based on time, convenience, flexibility and the green factor," says Jim, 50, whose daughter Hazel is nine.

"I used to love flying, but these days you're made to feel like self-loading luggage, and by the time you've parked, checked in, cleared security and done the transfer at the other end, timings for flying to Geneva or Lyons are similar, and the stress factor considerably higher," he says.

Properties cost from €165,000 (£140,000) for a one-bedroom apartment up to €995,000 (£844,000) for a four-bedroom penthouse (through Erna Low).

All have their own parking space and are available with standard or leaseback ownership.

Or there's a "nearly new" leaseback – 2-3 years old with 6-7 years left on the lease – now £131,599, which was £164,499 when new.

Discounting is rare, though, as a prudent attitude to development in the Alps has limited oversupply, according to Jeremy Rollason of Savills Alpine Homes. "In the

newbuild sector, developers are hardening their stance and holding prices. Yes, there's been some price correction, but the market has been driven by the French making the most of tax breaks on newbuild homes."

In the resale sector, however the time for "silly offers" is over, according to Gareth Jefferies of Winkworth France.

"Prices are now much more realistic, after falls of up to 25 per cent from their peak," he says. "There's a disparity between what British buyers are offering and what locals will accept. They are rejecting most offers." He suggests that the 19th-century resort of St Gervais is a good non-fly choice (about 9½ hours by train then car), near the chic resort of Megève, but more affordable.

"It's full of beautiful Victorian apartments, a long-established resort with plenty of character," he says. "A chalet in the centre of Megève starts at €2m (£1.7m); in St Gervais it is €700,000 (£594,000)."

Erna Low has an "affordable" project in Megève, priced from €250,000 (£212,000) for a studio apartment five minutes from the beautiful old cobbled centre of the village.

Those seeking an authentic village on a smaller scale – and with a penchant for off-piste – might try Sainte-Foy, 15 minutes drive from Bourg St Maurice. Ski instructors use the uncrowded, tree-lined pistes on



their days off, and its low-key reputation is reflected in property prices; you can get a two-bedroom resale apartment from around €250,000, or a new one with leaseback ownership, from €183,700/£156,000 (Experience International, 020 7321 5858).

Sainte-Foy is close to the Espace Killy ski area that links Val d'Isère with Tignes.

The well-known resort of Val d'Isère (25 minutes from Bourg) is a lively all-rounder that is great for rentals, with the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment £1,800 (compared with £1,100 for Sainte-Foy and £750 for Les Gets, below) according to HomeAway, Britain's largest holiday rentals site. A two-bedroom apartment in the modern part of Val, La Daille, is available through Erna Low for €230,000 (£195,000).

Also a firm favourite with the British, though lacking the old-world charm of Megève and St Gervais, is Les Gets in the Portes du Soleil ski area.

Aylesford is selling an old Savoyard farm refurbished into an eight-bedroom ski property for €850,000 (£721,000); Savills have ski-in ski-out newbuilds from €360,000 (£305,000). This old farming town, with great childcare facilities and gentle slopes, can also be reached in nine hours – by rail then road. No airport queues, security hassles – or being made to feel like self-loading luggage.

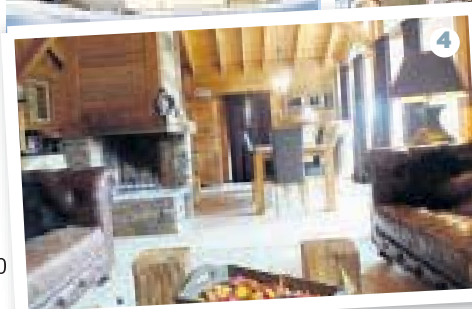
FOR SALE IN THE SAVOIE

1 LES GETS £1.29m. Ski-in ski-out with six bedrooms and six bathrooms. (Winkworth, 0845 680 1074; www.winkworth.fr)

2 MEGÈVE £2.19m. Newbuild chalet in Combloux, just outside the resort, with four bedrooms, three bathrooms and a spa. (Savills Alpine Homes, 020 7016 3740; www.alpinehomesintl.com)

3 LES GETS £420,400 to £536,300. Last two apartments at L'Athena, Portes du Soleil. Near the village centre, with two bedrooms and open plan living rooms (Savills, as before).

4 ARC 1950 £234,373. With two bedrooms, this newbuild apartment is in the Hameau du Glacier residence complex and is sold on a leaseback basis. (Erna Low Property, 020 7590 1624; www.ernalowproperty.co.uk)





ALAMY

Grounded: resorts in the Savoie area of France, such as Val d'Isère, are a good option for those wanting to avoid flying; Jim Wilks and his family always travel by train to their apartment in Arc 1950