Tignes

Stark apartment blocks and a bleak, treeless setting are the prices you pay for the high, snow-sure slopes and varied terrain

- Good snow guaranteed for a long season – about the best Alpine bet
- One of the best areas in the world for lift-served off-piste runs
- Huge amount of varied terrain, with swift access to Val d’Isère
- Lots of accommodation close to the slopes
- Efforts to make the resort villages more welcoming are paying off

The appeal of Tignes is simple: good snow, spread over a wide area of varied terrain, shared with Val d’Isère. The altitude of Tignes is crucial: a forecast of ‘rain up to 2000m’ means ‘fresh snow down to village level in Tignes’.

We prefer to stay in Val, which is a more human place. But in many ways Tignes makes the better base: appreciably higher, more convenient, surrounded by intermediate terrain, with quick access to the Grande Motte glacier. And the case gets stronger as results flow from Tignes’ campaign to reinvent itself in a more cuddly form. The place is a lot less hostile to the visitor than it once was.

In the past few seasons the resort has also, at last, got around to installing some fast chairs on the western side of the Tignes bowl. But there are still a few key links that need upgrading.

THE RESORT

Tignes was created before the French discovered the benefits of making purpose-built resorts look acceptable. Things are improving, and the villages are gradually acquiring a more traditional look and feel.

Tignes-le-Lac is the hub of the resort, split into two sub resorts, Le Rosset and Le Bec-Rouge. It’s at the point where these two meet – a snowy pedestrian area, with valley traffic now passing through a tunnel beneath – that the lifts are concentrated: a powerful gondola towards Tovière and Val d’Isère and a fast six-pack up the western slopes. There is also a suburb built on the lower slopes known as Le Almes. A nursery slope separates Le Rosset from the fourth component part, the group of apartment blocks called Le Lavachet, below which there are good fast lifts up both sides.

Val Claret is 2km/1 mile up the valley, beyond the lake. From there, fast chairs head up to the western slopes, towards Val d’Isère and to the Grande Motte. An underground funicular also accesses Grande Motte.

Beginner

- Terrain

Expert

- Terrain

Extent

- Lifts

Extent

- Lifts

Restaurants

- Lifts

Schools

- Lifts

Eating out

- Lifts

Après-ski

- Lifts

The mountains

Extant

- Lifts

Snow

- Lifts

Terrain p’s

- Lifts

Expert

- Lifts

Intermediate

- Lifts

Beginner

- Lifts

X-country

- Lifts

Convenience

- Lifts

Schools

- Lifts

Families

- Lifts

The resort

Charm

- Lifts

Convenience

- Lifts

Scenery

- Lifts

Eating out

- Lifts

Après-ski

- Lifts

Off-slope

- Lifts

THE MOUNTAINS

The area’s great weakness is that it can become unusable in bad weather. There are no woodland runs except immediately above Tignes-les-Boisses and Tignes-Brevieres. Heavy snow produces widespread avalanche risk and wind closes the higher chairs.

Piste classification here is more reliable than in Val d’Isère (‘excellent’ says a 2009 visitor) and signposting is ‘very clear’. But we’ve had complaints that lift and piste opening information is unreliable.

EXTENT OF THE SLOPES

High, snow-sure and varied

Tignes and Val d’Isère share a huge area of slopes known as L’Espace Killy. Locally, Tignes’ biggest asset is the Grande Motte – and the runs from, as well as on, the glacier. The underground funicular from Val Claret whizzes you up to over 3000m/9,840ft in seven minutes. There are blue, red and black runs to play on up here, as well as beautiful long runs back to the resort.

The main lifts towards Val d’Isère are efficient: a high-capacity gondola from Val Claret to Toviere, and a fast chair with covers from Val Claret to Col de Fresse. You can head back to Tignes from either: the return from Toviere to Tignes-le-Lac is via a steep black run but there are easier blue runs to Val Claret.

Going up the opposite side of the valley takes you to a quieter area of
predominantly east-facing slopes split into two main sectors, linked in both directions – Col du Palet and l’Aiguille Percée. This whole mountainside has at last been given some of the fast lifts it has needed for years – there are five so far.

The Col des Ves chairlift, at the south end of the Col du Palet sector, serves one of the six ‘naturides’ (see ‘For experts’). You can descend from l’Aiguille Percée to Tignes-les-Brévières on blue, red or black runs. There’s an efficient gondola back, but the chairs above it are old and slow and need upgrading (‘a quicker route back is the bus’, says a reporter).

FAST LIFTS ★★★★
Improved but not good enough
Fast chairs and gondolas get you up the mountain from most parts of the resort. Recent investment has added more fast chairs higher up too, but a few key slow ones remain that could do with being upgraded.

QUEUES ★★★★★
Very few
The queues here depend on snow conditions. If snow low down is poor, the Grande Motte funicular generates queues; the fast chairs in parallel with it are often quicker, despite the longer ride time. These lifts jointly shift a lot of people, with the result that the red run down to Val Claret can be unpleasantly crowded (the roundabout Génépy blue is a much quieter option). The worst queues now are for the cable car on the glacier – half-hour waits are common. Of course, if higher lifts are closed by heavy snow or high winds, the lifts on the lower slopes have big queues. Otherwise there are usually few problems; crowded pistes are more of an issue.

TERRAIN PARKS ★★★★★
Vastly improved
Tignes was one of the first French resorts to build a terrain park but we’ve had some criticism of the park predominantly east-facing slopes split into two main sectors, linked in both directions – Col du Palet and l’Aiguille Percée. This whole mountainside has at last been given some of the fast lifts it has needed for years – there are five so far.

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At the top, the best snow in Espace Killy. Lower down, the lovely red back to Val Claret can be very crowded – try the scenic Génépy blue alternative.

The only run from Tovière to Tignes-le-Lac is a black, and the blue run to Val Claret gets very busy. Accessing Tignes from Col de Fresse is more relaxing.

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The Sache is our favourite black run (so long as it’s not top-to-bottom bumps). 1200m/3,940ft vertical down a secluded valley.
Tignes has always been a popular destination for snowboarders. Lots of easily accessible off-piste and the fact that it’s cheaper than Val d’Isère are the main attractions, and quite a few top UK snowboarders make this their winter home. For those who buy the Espace Killy lift ticket, the backside of Col de Fresse in Val d’Isère is a natural playground. There are a few flat areas (avoid Génevé and Macètre), but the lift system relies more on chairs and gondolas than drags (though a long drag serves the boardercross area). There are long, wide pistes to blast down, such as Grattatul, Carlène and Piste H, with acres of powder between them to play in. There are three specialist snowboard schools (Snowcool, Surf Feeling and Alliance) and a snowboard chalet (www.dragonlodge.com). Go to Snowpark-shop in Tignes-le-Lac for all your freestyle needs.

**SCHOOLS**

ESF  0479 063028
Evolition 2  0479 063576
Snowcool  0479 243094
Surf Feeling  0608 868430
Alliance  0645 120824  0844 484 9390 (UK)
New Generation  0479 01 03 18  www.skinevgen.com
All Ross Shilling Clinics  0479 400040

**Classes (ESF prices)**

6 half days: €140
Private lessons From €42 for 1hr

**GUIDES**

Bureau des Guides  0479 064276
Tetra  0631 499275

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**LIFT PASSES**

Espace Killy

Prices in £

Age incl. 3-14  15-24  25-49  50-65  over 65
3 days (Mon-Fri)  £38  £43  £44  £44  £44
3 days (Sat-Sun)  £44  £49  £50  £50  £50
6 days  £84  £94  £94  £94  £94
14 days  £140  £149  £149  £149  £149

Available at: Snowbrainer, 1/8 Russell Street, London, WC2H 9LE  020 7471 7700
E-mail: sales@skisolutions.com
Website: www.skisolutions.com

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**BORDERING**

In the past, however, for 2008/09 Swatch started sponsoring it and the park (on Col du Palet above Val Claret) was completely redesigned with all levels in mind. A new ‘Shoot my Ride’ scheme was also started; your run is filmed and then played back on a plasma screen at the bottom of the park. You can watch it later online. There’s a boardercross too. Tignes also has a 120m/390ft long half-pipe, which is well shaped and a good size for those not as comfortable with a superpipe. It is right at the bottom of the mountain, which means if you have the energy to hike, you can ride it for free. In the summer the park doubles in size and moves up to the Grande Motte for freestyle camps. There’s also a children’s park in Le Lac.

**Skiing**

Snow reliability ****

Difficult to beat

Tignes has all-year-round runs (barring brief closures in spring or autumn) on its Grande Motte glacier. And the resort height of 2100m/6900ft generally means good snow-cover right back to base for most of the long winter season – November to May. The west-facing runs down from Col de Fresse and Tovière to Val Claret suffer from the afternoon sun, although they now have superb snowmaking. Some of the lower east-facing and south-east-facing slopes on the other side of the valley can suffer late in the season, too. Grooming is ‘excellent’.

**FOR EXPERTS ****

An excellent choice

Tignes has converted six of its black runs into ‘naturides’, which means they are never groomed (a neat way of saving money!) but they are marked, patrolled and avalanche protected. Many of them are not especially steep (eg the Ves run – promoted from red status and renamed after the local freeride hero Guerlain Chicherit). Perhaps the most serious challenge is the long black run from Tovière to Tignes-le-Lac, with steep, usually heavily mogulled sections (the top part, Pâquerettes, is now a naturide, with the bottom part, Trolleil, is the normal black). Parts of this run get a lot of afternoon sun. Our favourite black run (still a ‘normal’ black) is the Sache, from l’Aiguille Percée down a secluded valley to Tignes-les-Brevières. It can become very heavily mogulled, especially at the bottom – you can avoid this section by taking the red (used to be blue) Arcosses piste option part-way down. But it is the off-piste possibilities that make Tignes such a draw for experts. Go with one of the off-piste groups that the schools organise and you’ll have a great time. See the freestyle camps. There’s also a good nursery slopes, but...

Good nursery slopes, but...

The nursery slopes of Tignes-le-Lac and Lavachet (which meet at the top) are excellent – convenient, snow-sure, gentle, free of through-traffic and served by a slow chair and a drag. The ones at Val Claret are less appealing: an unpleasantly steep slope within the village served by a drag, and a less convenient slope served by the fast Bollin chair. All of these lifts are free. Although there are some fairly easy blues on the west side of Tignes, for long green runs you have to go over to the Val d’Isère sector. You need an Espace Killy pass to use them, and to get back to Tignes you have a choice between the blue run from Col de Fresse (which has a tricky start) or riding the gondola down to Tovière. And in poor weather, the high Tignes valley is an intimidatingly bleak place – enough to make any wavering beginner retreat to a bar with a book.

**FOR CROSS-COUNTRY ★★★★★

Interesting variety**

The Espace Killy has 44km/27miles of cross-country trails, including 20km/12 miles of tracks on the frozen Lac de Tignes, along the valley between Val Claret and Tignes-le-Lac, at Les Boisses and Les Brévères and up on the Grande Motte.

**MOUNTAIN RESTAURANTS ★★★★★

A couple of good places**

The mountain restaurants are not a highlight – a regular hazard of high, purpose-built resorts, where it’s easy to go back to the village for lunch.

**Editors’ choice**

Lo Soli (0479 060742) at the top of the Chaudannes chair is a clear favourite. The terrace shares with the adjacent self-service Alpago a superb view of the Grande Motte; a reporter endorses our opinion: ‘excellent food, ambiance and service; excellent gâteau d’agneau, Caesar salad and melt-in-the-mouth pot-au-feu’. The table-service bit of the
Tignes-le-Lac is a bit of an eyesore, especially when it's not covered in snow. But you come here for the great snow-sure slopes not the village charm →

CHILDCARE
Les Marmottons
4 0479 063167
Ages 30mth to 6yr
Ski schools
Evolution 2 takes children from age 5 and ESF takes children from age 4 (6 days £210)

GETTING THERE
Air
Geneva
225km/140 miles (3hr30);
Lyon 230km/145 miles (3hr15);
Chambery 145km/90 miles (2hr15)
Rail
Bourg-St-Maurice
30km/19 miles;
regular buses or taxi from station

ACTIVITIES
indoor Wellness and fitness centre (pools, saunas, Turkish baths, hot tub, spa and beauty treatments, weight training), multi-sports hall, yoga, squash, climbing wall, library, bowling, heritage centre
Outdoor Dog sledding, mountain biking, ice climbing, ice driving, ice diving, ice rink, tobogganing, paragliding, ski jumping, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, biking on snow, horse riding, helicopter trips

SMART LODGINGS
Check out our feature chalets at the front of the book.

Panoramic (0479 063721) at the top of the funicular competes; one regular reporter gives it the edge: ‘a veritable joy – excellent rack of lamb, tiramisu’.
Worth knowing about The atmospheric chalet at the top of Tovière is ‘fairly basic’ but does ‘very good portions’. A reporter found the ‘service just OK’. At the top of the Tichot chair from Val Claret, the Palet ‘serves good food at good prices’. On the nursery slope above Val Claret, the ‘expensive’ Chalet du Bollini has been recommended for its ‘casserole served from the pot and the portion is huge! Excellent’. The big Panoramic self-service at the top of the funicular gets crowded, but has great views from its huge terrace and ‘good portions at reasonable prices’.

Tignes-le-Lac, the Arbina offers ‘consistent high quality’.
At the extremity of the lift system, Les Brévieres makes an obvious lunch stop. A short walk round the corner into the village brings you to places much cheaper than the two by the piste. Sachette, for example, is crammed with artefacts from mountain life and offers ‘lots of good cheese dishes’. The Étoile des Neiges ‘serves great, typical Savoyard food’.

SCHOOLS AND GUIDES

Plenty of choice
There are over half-a-dozen schools, including three specialist snowboard schools, plus various independent instructors. A recent reporter recommends Ali Ross Skiing Clinics (pre-booking required) – ‘a great character who achieved results’. Reporters advise that at any time pre-booking is ‘essential’ for normal schools as well. ESF gets mixed reviews: one 2008 reporter tells of an instructor losing a pupil, who then had to find and fund his own way home from Val d’Isère, and all of those in this reporter’s group who tried the ESF had ‘bad experiences’. But one child was ‘admirably looked after’ and the instructor showed ‘great professionalism and understanding’. New Generation, a British-run school with branches in five other resorts, opened in Tignes last season. See the Courchevel, Méribel, Les Arcs and Val d’Isère chapters for glowing reports of their instruction.

Reports on Evolution 2 are generally positive for adult tuition. Members of a recent reporter’s group were pleased with their progress and one took private lessons with an ‘encouraging and very patient instructor’. The off-piste ‘Tarentaise Tour’ has also been praised (‘a superb long day, with an enthusiastic guide!’). But one visitor was ‘very unhappy’ with the children’s lessons: ‘The children changed level every class. At the end of one lesson, the class arrived back without our child – when asked where she was, the instructor said he simply didn’t know. She returned later with another group.’ The same reporter moved his children to their class at the 333 school where ‘the difference was dramatic – I would highly recommend them’.

BASS has ‘excellent, small group clinics’, and we have a glowing report of a British-run snowboarding outfit, Alliance: ‘They teach with passion and enthusiasm; by far the best week’s instruction I have received.’

FOR FAMILIES

Mixed reports
We have had good reports on the Marmottons kindergartens – ‘brilliant’ said a father of a four year old – and the Spritelets ski classes arranged by Esprit Ski and Evolution 2: ‘She loved her class and could snowplough by the end of the week.’ But we’ve also received a poor report for Evolution 2 (see ‘Schools’).

STAYING THERE
All three main styles of accommodation are available through tour operators. More luxury options are appearing.

Chalets
The choice of catered chalets is increasing. Ski Total have several smart chalets, including some with pool, hot tub and sauna. Total’s Chalet Arcitc is ‘excellent, comfortable’, with pool and sauna. Family specialist Esprit has a chalet hotel and several chalets here, including the smart new Corniche with sauna, steam and hot tub for this season. Ski Olympic’s chalet hotel Rosset and chalet Madeleine have been recommended by reporters; their other chalets look good too.

Mark Warner has two chalet hotels, one with an outdoor pool.

Hotels
The few hotels are small and concentrated in Le Lac.

***Campanules (0479 063436) Smartly rustic chalet in upper Le Lac, with good restaurant. One reporter was impressed enough to suggest that it deserved a 4-star rating.

***Village Montana (0479 001144) Stylishly wooded, on the east-facing slopes above Le Lac, with a 4-star suites section. Outdoor pool, sauna, steam, hot tub.

***Lévanna (0479 063294) Central in Le Lac – comfortable, with a ‘generous hot tub’; a reporter found ‘friendly staff but a woeful lack of them’.


**Arbina (0479 063478) Well-run place close to the lifts in Le Lac, with lunchtime terrace, crowded après-ski bar and one of the best restaurants.


Apartments
There are lots of apartments in all price ranges. Ema Low and Ski Collection have some good-looking options and Leisure Direction and Ski Amis do self-catered places here too. The growing number of smart places include the Ecrin des Neiges, Ferme du Val Claret and Nevada in Val Claret and Telemark and Residence Village Montana in Le Lac.

In Les Brévères, the Belvedere has very smart large apartments and chalets with three to six bedrooms. All the above have access to pool, sauna etc, but at extra cost in some cases.
The Chalet Club in Val Claret is a collection of simple studios, but it has a free indoor pool, sauna and in-house restaurant and bar.

Alpservice specialises in cheap accommodation for young people who want to spend the season – or at least several weeks – in a resort.

The supermarket at Le Lac is reported to be ‘comprehensive but very expensive’.

EATING OUT ★★★★

Good places scattered about

The options in Le Lavachet are rather limited, though a recent reporter enjoyed the Grenier with its ‘excellent cold meats and tartiflette’ and another ‘novel experience’ of eating with over-wintering farm animals on display through a viewing window at the ‘atmospheric’ Ferme des 3 Capucines (we had a good lunch here in 2009 too). And we have very positive reports of the British-run Brasero: ‘This restaurant is establishing a good reputation in Tignes; the food was quite simply excellent. We were made to feel very welcome.’ Finding anywhere with some atmosphere is difficult in Le Lac, though the food in some of the better hotels is good. The Campanules has ‘exemplary service’, but the food ‘wasn’t as memorable as on other occasions’, says a regular visitor. The Arbina continues to provide ‘outstanding food, very good value and first-class service’. The Escale Blanche is almost as popular. Two visitors recommend the ‘delicious food’ at the ‘quirky’ Clín d’Oeil. Bagus Cafe’s ‘eclectic cuisine’ is also praised. One visitor particularly highlights the Monday champagne nights at the Alpaka Lodge – ‘a relaxed restaurant with duck breast the star attraction’. A recent visitor enjoyed ‘traditional food’ at the Eterlou.

In Val Claret the Caveau is recommended for a special treat – ‘superbly presented food and good service in an intimate cellar setting’. The Petit Savoyard ‘is friendly with efficient service’. The buffet at the Indochine has been strongly recommended by several reporters. Pepe 2000 has ‘reasonable prices and helpful staff’, but a reporter says the Pignetta ‘slightly trumps it’ and is enjoyable at lunchtime too – one reporter’s group ‘savouré really tasty meals’. The Auberge des 3 Oursons was recommended for ‘massive portions, friendly service’.

The Cordée in Les Boisses offers unpretentious surroundings, good traditional French food, modest prices.

APRES-SKI ★★★★★

Hidden away

Reporters agree that there is plenty going on if you know where to find it. Val Claret has some early-evening atmosphere, and happy hours are popular. Reporters differ on the merits of the Crowded House (popular with Brits). Grizzly’s is ‘cosy and atmospheric, but you pay for the ambience’. The ‘whisky lounge’ in the Coulor is a ‘great place to relax’.

Le Lac is a natural focus for immediate après-ski drinks. The ‘lively’ Loop, with pool table, has a ‘two for one’ happy hour from 4 to 6pm. The bar of the hotel Arbina is our kind of spot – adequately cosy, friendly service. It’s a great place to sit outside and people-watch. The Alpaka Cocktail Bar is ‘hard to leave’, ‘a real gem later on’. TC’s bar is ‘very friendly, with good music’. Jack’s is a popular late haunt.

OFF THE SLOPES ★★★★★

Forget it

Despite the range of alternative activities, Tignes is a resort for those who want to use the slopes, where anyone who doesn’t is liable to feel like a fish out of water. Some activities do get booked up quickly as well – a reporter said it was impossible to find a free dog sledding slot in April. The ice skating on the lake includes a 500m/1,640ft circuit as well as a conventional rink. There’s ice driving at Les Brévières. The Lagon leisure centre, with various pools, slides, wellness and fitness facilities, meets with readers’ approval and a 2009 visitor’s kids ‘really enjoyed the bowling alley’ at Tignes le Lac.