IN THE KNOW

Mountain News

Read all about it! Here is your monthly news briefing, bringing you up to date with the latest developments in your favourite ski resorts

WORDS **NICOLA ISEARD**

ALL ACTION IN LES MENUIRES

The big news for Les Menuires last season was the opening of the cutting-edge cable car in La Masse, which provides access to the peak – and the area's pacey reds and thrilling blacks – in less than eight minutes (reduced by two-thirds compared with the old lift).

S+b writer Katy Dartford was there last season, and as fun as the skiing was (much of the best on-piste skiing in the Three Valleys is to be found in Les Menuires), it was launching herself down the Roc 'n' Bob sledding track (pictured), accessible via the Roc 1 gondola, that really got her adrenaline racing.

"Picking up speed quickly along the 4km track with its 450 metres of drop, I used my feet and the metal brakes to slow down and skid around the 22 tight berms, which seemed to have nothing but a precipice below them..." It's a must-do for any families heading there this winter – big whoops guaranteed.

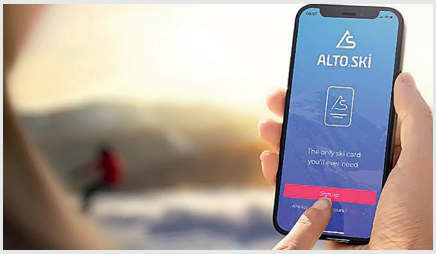
For something a bit more mellow, and an alternative après-ski, Katy recommends donning skins for a gentle guided ski tour towards the Refuge du Lac du Lou at sunset for a traditional fondue dinner.

"Cheese and potatoes laden, it took about 20 minutes to cruise down on our skis, using head torches to guide the way."

lesmenuires.com



PHOTO **VINCENT LOTTENBERG**



SKI PASS REVOLUTION

The future of lift passes is here – so says SCGB's Chemmy Alcott. Our Mrs President is referring to Alto.Ski, a pay-as-you-go ski pass that gives you the best price on the day. Don't want to ski a full day? The Alto.Ski app calculates the best price based on use and charges at end-of-play. "When the world is moving at such a crazy pace, we have seen a rise of the spontaneous traveller. They don't want to faff around with lift queues. It will be like the Oyster card in London," says Chemmy. It's early days for Alto.Ski with just a handful of resorts currently signed up, but it's certainly one to watch. We'll be testing it out this ski season so check back. **alto.ski**



MEANWHILE IN VAIL...

Vail Resorts, which owns and operates 41 resorts worldwide, has announced its plan to introduce a new technology that will allow guests to store their ski pass directly on their phone – eliminating the need to carry a card, visit the ticket window, or wait to receive a pass or lift ticket in the mail. With the new innovation, guests will be able to buy their pass online, activate it on their phone, put their phone in their pocket, and get scanned, hands free, using Bluetooth. Clever stuff! The new feature will be tested this season, with roll-out to guests expected for the 2023/24 season.

vailresorts.com



GLACIER 3000 GETS STEEEEEP

One of the world's steepest inbound runs is debuting at Glacier 3000 – the only glacier ski area in Switzerland's Bernese Oberland – this season. Skiers begin by traversing through a 265m tunnel under the glacier, before being spat out on a slope with a 41-degree pitch (88%) that drops 1,000m vertical metres to the valley below. The development is reviving the old Pierres Pointes run that closed in 1999. We'll see you there! **glacier3000.ch**



ROCKYPOP HEADS TO ISÈRE

Here's one for skiers flying into, or out of, Grenoble this season (or, indeed, planning to visit one of its many ski areas within driving distance). If you need to somewhere to stay, the new RockyPop hotel just opened its doors in the heart of the city. With a choice of studios, apartments and penthouses, RockyPop's unique concept combines value-for-money with four-star hotel comfort and bags of fun – play areas include karaoke, petanque, table tennis and a children's area – alongside a top-notch bar, restaurant and wellness area. There is also an on-site florist and bike shop, naturally... From €90 per night. **alpes-isere.com**



HANDICAP-FRIENDLY IN LA PLAGNE

La Plagne is a highly accessible resort with several measures in place to assist those with disabilities. New for this winter, ESF La Plagne will launch five new week-long ski courses for deaf skiers, culminating in a fun, timed competition on the Belle Plagne slalom field. The seven-day courses run on specific weeks throughout the ski season. ESF has a total of five instructors who are fluent in sign language and who will also offer private or group lessons, aiming to make Belle Plagne the ultimate holiday location for these skiers. Prices to be announced. **en.la-plagne.com**



JAPOW FOR ALL AS BORDERS OPEN

Niseko is preparing for tourists for the first time in three years as, finally, the country's borders open to visitors. While many other winter resorts in Japan have a significant number of domestic visitors from cities such as Tokyo, Osaka and Sendai, visitors to Niseko are mostly from overseas. So what can tourists expect? In short, the same; but better. Construction of new lifts, new hotels and new facilities have been completed. Bed down at the new hotel Sansui Niseko, opening its doors for the first time this month, as well as The Andaru Collection Niseko, and Setsu Niseko that have both opened in advance of the winter season. **niseko.ne.jp/en**



NIPPY DIPS IN SAMOËNS

This winter, Samoëns is proud to host the 2023 World Ice Swimming Championships. This fast-growing activity for experienced swimmers will take pride of place at the Lac aux Dames from 12 to 15 January 2023. The Grand Massif resort is used to staging the French Championships for the activity, but it's the first time it will host the world champs. In total, 600 swimmers from 33 countries (including 15 swimmers from the UK) will race in the lake waters (under 5°C) in the knowledge that neoprene wetsuits are banned! All the swimmers will thus be wearing swimsuits only, in the pure tradition of ice swimming. **samoens.com**



SNOW PERFECTION IN COURMAYEUR

The Aosta Valley is legendary for its piste maintenance, and now visitors heading to Courmayeur can expect conditions to be better than ever – regardless of when it last snowed. A new snowmaking system – with a €6m investment – is set to be completed, covering more than 80% of the area. Keep informed about snow reports with the Courmayeur Mont Blanc app, which can be downloaded from Android and Apple stores, and provides real-time information about open slopes and lifts, snow reports, webcams, and interactive maps. **aosta-valley.co.uk/destinations/courmayeur**



SKI TOURING MADE EASY IN MÉRIBEL

New to ski touring? Méribel has created a new introductory ski touring trail, called Le Roc. The gentle uphill slope is a great introduction to a sport that's booming in popularity, allowing novices to discover touring in complete safety right next to the ski area. At the top of the Chalets gondola lift, put on your skins and set off on an easy 2km walk with a 370m climb towards the Chalet du Lac. When you reach the top, stop in the chalet for a well-deserved vin chaud and enjoy the views! **meribel.net**

PHOTOS **LORENZO BELFROND, NISEKO PROMOTION BOARD**