



SNOWBOARDS AND SUN SALUTATIONS

Martin D. Clark goes off piste for a yoga retreat with a difference: a ski and snowboarding adventure in the magical playground of the French Alps

Ever wondered how much fun you can cram into a single week? I was determined to find out on a yoga and skiing trip to the French Alps with Soulshine Retreats.

To be honest, a yoga retreat in a cosy Alpine chalet outside the resort town of La Rosiere sounded pretty great anyway. But throw in the winter sports element and you're in for an adventure.

Actually, in my case it was yoga and snowboarding, not skiing

(although the rest of the group were skiers); I'm only a beginner, but enthusiastic, and keen to learn.

But the idea, of course, is the same. Go bananas on the slopes during the day, then put yourself back together in the evenings with a winning blend of yoga, massage, healthy food and a dip in the hot tub...plus the obligatory chat with your pals over the day's events on the piste.

What could possibly go wrong?

The ice man cometh

I packed my bags and jetted off to Geneva, one of the main airports that serve the western end of the Alps. From there, one of a team of drivers from the Soulshine stable will transport you and your gear (including boards and skis if you've brought them) up the hills towards La Rosiere.

After crossing the Swiss-French border, that means making your way initially through the foothills and up the winding roads, and then ultimately into the tight hairpin bends that lead up to the resort.

Actually, the chalet itself - Chalet Montperron - is located just outside La Rosiere, a short drive down the mountain, though it's still high enough for you to enjoy spectacular views from your very snug accommodation.

Watch the sunny vistas across the valleys of snow with a warming cup of chai (or even in the outdoor hot tub), or gaze out at the twinkling lights from houses in the distance after your day's skiing (or boarding) as night falls over the stunning Tarantaise valley.

Home from home

The chalet itself offers 180 degree panoramic views of the valley and is located about 20 minutes from the ski resort itself.

Inside, you'll find everything you need for a week's stay in the mountains: nightly

log fires conducive to cosy fireside chats, a sauna, hot chocolate and some great yoga company to go with it.

Chalet Montperron is a large traditional French Alpine residence, about 150 years old, that's surrounded by woodland and perched on the cliff overlooking the valley.

As you'd expect, it's full of charm and character, with original features including classic Baroque stone, exposed beams and views from most of the rooms revealing the stunning vista of Bourg St Maurice.

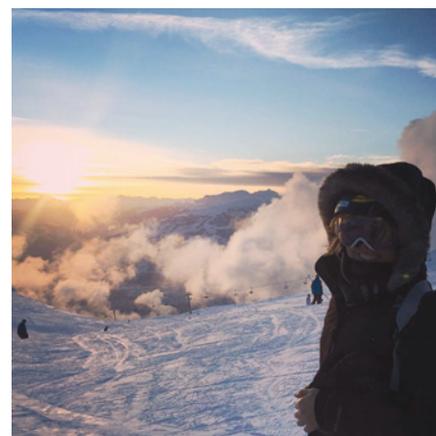
And yet it also boasts all modern luxuries (including sauna and hot tub) so you can stay in total comfort and be pampered after your frolics (or mishaps) on the slopes.

From the house, there are morning and late afternoon shuttle buses to ferry you back and forwards each day to and from the mountain, or the Soulshine team will always try to accommodate you if there's a change in the schedule or the weather gets rough.

Just outside the chalet is a separate space where you can store all your wet snow gear, while the concierge will be happy to advise on lift passes, classes or equipment hire if you need help.

Yoga therapy

Then, of course, there's the yoga. It might seem a total contrast to the winter sports theme, but the yoga is the thread that brings



everything together; they really are quite complementary.

The amazing yoga deck spans the top floor of the chalet to create a gorgeous wellness space with its own views over the valley and crackling log fire, just perfect for an evening yin yoga class.

You'll find a variety of teachers depending on which week you go, including Soulshine Retreats creator Soulla Demetriou, but expect a more awakening, dynamic Vinyasa Flow practice in the morning, followed by a calm, restorative session in the evening.

It's a great way to open and close the day, and to soothe any aches and pains from the skiing.

In my case, as a beginner snowboarder, where bumps and bruises come with the





RETREAT & SURRENDER

Soulshine Retreats will be running seven-night Snow Yoga & Ski Adventures throughout the winter season from early January through to early April 2017. The trip costs from £1,190pp staying in a triple room and from £1,290pp staying in a twin room. The price includes half-board accommodation plus tea and cake every afternoon, a daily 60-minute morning Dynamic Yoga session and 75-minute deliciously relaxing evening Yoga and Meditation session, 1x 30-minute muscle-soothing massage, a complimentary airport transfer and a daily morning and evening shuttle service to and from the chalet to the ski lifts. A dedicated Soulshine Retreats host is on hand throughout to ensure maximum pampering, as well as an on-site team to attend the chalet and prepare the deliciously hearty Alpine cuisine. Price excludes flights and ski passes. Soulshine Retreats can assist with organising ski passes, equipment hire and ski classes at the time of booking. For detailed information on dates, prices and early bird offers visit: soulshineretreats.com



territory, it's comforting knowing your body's getting some TLC before and after the day's onslaught on the slopes.

The restorative poses certainly help minimise those morning aches so familiar after a day on the slopes...be gone, heavy morning legs!

The yoga is pitched at all levels too, so total beginners are welcome, although more advanced practitioners will also be challenged if looking for more of a workout.

And, while this can be a very physical holiday, that does not mean there's no soul or spirit on a Soulshine Retreat (and no, we're talking Jaegermeister!), with plenty of meditation, some Yoga Nidra and time for reflection thrown in as well.

It's also a very healthy holiday, with nutritious and delicious food served each evening by your very own talented chef, plus morning veg juices and a buffet to kickstart your day in the mornings.

On the slopes

The skiing area of La Rosiere likewise offers something for everyone, from hopeless newbies (hey, we've all been there!), to seasoned pros.

With an excellent snow record, it's been dubbed the best-kept secret of the Tarantaise Valley, and forms part of a wider French-Italian ski area, Espace San Bernardo, that spans 160 km.

The resort boasts long and gentle slopes on the French side with more challenging skiing on the north face of the mountain, in Italy's Aosta Valley.

Families and beginners can meander along the sunny, south-facing slopes, while pleasure-seekers can set off on a quest to sample Italian delicacies in the mountain cafes across the border (don't worry, you don't need your passport).

Sure enough, some of my group, at least the more experienced skiers, zoomed off to Italy to quaff the legendary bombardino (a hot drink typically made with brandy) in one of the inviting on-piste cafes on the Italian side.

It's a great resort for both skiers and boarders and there are a vast array of classes and tuition to help out if you need an experienced eye to improve your technique.

On my trusted board, I linked my turns for the first time (yay!) and, after a bit of instruction, started to feel more confident on the





slopes, albeit slightly battered and bruised from the learning process. (Hey, you can't make an omelette without cracking an egg, right?).

It's a busy, popular holiday town so you'll also find lots of bars, shops and grocery stores here if you want a break from the skiing.

And there may be queues for the lifts at peak times, although that's not uncommon throughout the Alps, but this varies depending on which week you actually go.

Home from home

What's really special about the Soulshine experience is that home from home feeling, where you get to link up with a bunch of likeminded folks for an entirely new yoga experience.

Burn up all that winter sports energy on the slopes, then reset with yoga in the comfort of a plush Alpine chalet.

It's wonderful returning from a day on the piste to some scrumptious homemade cake, with tea served every afternoon upon your return to base.

Just being out in this spectacular natural wilderness is an exhilarating experience, breathing in the fresh air as you make your way down a mountain beneath crisp blue skies.

But you'll be embraced into the Soulshine family too, which means entering a house full of friends and experts (yoga teachers, therapists, healthy chefs) which can only be good for the soul too.

The small groups (typically no more than 10 students) mean you'll get plenty of attention both on and off the yoga mat and get a chance to get to know everyone.

Pretty much everyone in my group pledged to return again next year to catch up with their new friends, a mix of guests from the UK, the USA, and across the rest of Europe and even the Middle East.

The magic is that all are made to feel welcome. If you love yoga and want to try skiing or snowboarding it's the perfect introduction to the world of winter sports.

Likewise, if you're new to yoga, but love your skiing, then it's a chance to reconnect and rebalance and to experience the mountains in a different way – and far away from the usual apres-ski shenanigans.

Soula Demtetro's goal on her retreats is to inspire people to embrace their full potential and find the happiness and freedom that exists within us all – to shine bright!

So go on and embrace it all: ditch the ordinary life and let your soul shine. Just watch out for those pesky moguls as you're zooming down the mountainside. 🏂

