

Intermediates Ski Tips for Touring the Three Valleys

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We have skied here for 20 years so trust us, you really have chosen possibly the very best resort in the world for intermediates skiers. Our team are mainly skiers (although we have boarded too), so although we try , specific snowboarding tips are slightly limited. Definitely buy a 3-valley pass. It's worth every cent. You have an unbelievable area of over 600km (375 miles +) of pisted runs to explore without ever taking your skis off. You can ski every day, all day in sunshine (weather permitting of course). In a one week holiday you need never ski the same run twice. Download a copy of the 3 valleys piste map at www.skimottaret.com on the Local Knowledge page. This article will make far more sense to you when combined with the map. You may then decide to print out these pages and bring them with you. Feel free. Have good read at breakfast in your chalet or apartment, make some brief notes then head off for a great day on the slopes. We promise you that will find all this information very useful.

Mottaret:

Get yourself over to Mont Vallon, at the very far end of Mottaret, just as soon as possible for two of the best runs in the whole 3 valleys. Take Plattieres gondola to the 2nd stage then take **Bouvreuil** or go to the 3rd and top stage and take **Cote Brune**. Both excellent runs that catch the morning sun and will both get you to the Mont Vallon gondola. You will rarely find any large queues for this lift as it is not a direct part of the 3 valley tourist circuit. It's a really great area to get some serious and fast cruising in. At the top facing, northwest is the fabulous **Combe du Vallon** which usually has excellent snow. The top section is a bit steep with moguls but it's quite short and it gets much easier after that. At the very bottom (5 kilometers later) you will have to catch the short Mures Rouges chair to get back to the Mont Vallon gondola or alternatively continue all the way down to Mottaret by the **Ours blue** track.

The other great run on this section is **Campagnol**. This one faces southwest and catches far more sun. Both are superb long runs and are fairly quiet except at high season. This run down gives you the opportunity to return for another run or catch the Cote Brune chair.

In this same area is **Lac de la Chambre** and **Venturon** .Two superb runs down from Mont de la Chambre, which is reached by the Cote Brune chair lift just mentioned. In early winter this chair is freezing cold and it's a long ride so wrap up warm. This is also the most popular entrance to the Val Thorens valley so unless you have a 3 valley pass make sure you take the correct route down!

Lunch: If you drop back in to Mottaret near the apartment by the **Ours** blue run hang right over the bridge to Chatelet (signposted to Courchevel), just as you come in to Mottaret. You will end up opposite one of the best value restaurants in the 3 valleys....**Zig Zag**. It's very small, looks like a plain little cafe, but has a nice sun terrace, truly wonderful food (The chef is excellent!) and very reasonable prices. If you take the fast Plan des mains chair lift to Plattieres 2 then ski down to Mottaret , just before the very bottom you can traverse off piste to your right, and cross directly under the tree. You will just about reach the same bridge that drops right on to the Zig Zag terrace. Be warned though. If you visit this restaurant once it will, without doubt become your regular favorite.

Meribel Tournère:

In the early mornings you are better off skiing the Tournère (2434m) side of Meribel. It catches the morning sun, so in early season will not be so cold and in later season will not be icy, as is the Saulire side before 11am. Saulire gets the hot afternoon sun, so the snow melts then freezes hard at night. First thing in the morning in spring it's horrendous and will make your teeth full out! So catch the very first lifts on the Tournère side and you will find velvet carpets for up to one hour on most of the main blue and red pistes. If you find a long queue for the Gondola take the Plan de L'Homme chair. Its fast and actually quicker to the first stage of Tournère than the gondola itself. Then take the 2nd stage of the gondola or the Tournère drag lift. Just make sure you are one of the first to the top. It's truly well worth the effort. You can also take the two stage Olympic chair to the top of La Face. From here you can ski La Face, which although **black** is more like a **red** first thing in the morning, when it's usually nicely groomed. This was the ladies downhill run in the 92 Olympics and is always my first favorite run on sunny mornings. All the overnight runs that have been prepared are displayed at the tourist office and at the Chaudanne lift centre by the information desk.

In fresh powder get yourself on to the 9am Plan de L'Homme chair lift. The **red Eterlou** run alongside the Moon Park is usually un-groomed so you can enjoy powder practice for about 45 minutes before it's totally skied out. The short draglift at the bottom of this run opens at 9.20am (unless the lift attendant is also getting in a first run of the day!). In fact all of the **blues** and **reds** on this side of the mountain are really great in the mornings but then get worn and icy during the afternoons. At around 11am you can, if you wish, follow the sun and move over to the Saulire side.

Saulire:

All the runs here are usually excellent in the morning during early season but are in the shade at first. With a fall of fresh powder there is lots of safe off piste to the side of the main **blue pistes** as all the slopes here are not steep enough to trigger avalanches. (apart from those directly below the **Boulevard De Loze**, which **DO** avalanche!) The off piste under the Adret Chairlift is particularly good in new fresh snow. In the spring with hot sunny days, this side of the mountain however is very hard and icy until about 11am, and then can become very slushy in the late afternoon. At this time of the season 11am to 1pm can be a total dream.

From the top of the Saulire Gondola it is a fairly steep short run round to the right, after which the piste opens out to give a choice down to Mottaret or take the path further to the right for the Meribel Saulire section. This first short run can be icy and cold in high winds, and in poor snow be careful as you might find lots of small stones appearing.

Try **Maudit**, which is an incredible long run (over 1000m) and used to host the Meribel men's downhill race. Named after Georges Maudit, ex world champion. (He only lost to Jean Claude Killy by a fraction of a second in the 66 Olympics). It used to be a **black** but was changed to a **red** at the time of the Olympics for some reason. It's a bit steep at the top but otherwise **red** is the correct level. In fresh powder it is not usually groomed so is a great powder run first thing in the morning.

Pic Noir from the top of Col de la Loze is now for some unknown reason a **Blue!!!**. A more challenging blue you will not find anywhere in the 3 valleys. It is often closed at the beginning and end of the season due to lack of snow. However if the snow is good be sure to give this beautiful run through the trees a try. The chairlift up is the slowest in the 3 valleys so avoid it in cold or bad weather! At the top is the **Roc de Tania restaurant**, lovely slightly up market place with good food, incredible views from the fabulous sun terrace and an interesting launch pad for para gliders.

All the other **reds**, on this side are all ok for intermediate skiers with no nasty surprises, except they can become very worn and icy in the steeper sections later in the day.

Lunch: A great spot for lunch and absolute sun trap is the **Rond Point**. It's not cheap but the food is original and good quality. Over the road is the La Cava, a small family restaurant with very friendly service and great food at reasonable prices. Just below the Rond Point is the Adret Telebar, one of our all time favorites. Another good choice for those on a budget is to ski down to **Meribel Village** and have lunch at LDV. This Italian style restaurant has a great simple and inexpensive lunch menu plus a peaceful little sun terrace.

Courchevel 1850:

There are several ways to reach Courchevel. From the Zig Zag at Mottaret catch the old, very slow original Ramees chair (10 mins) next to the restaurant, then ski across to the Grand Rosiere Chair, equally slow (10 mins) which takes you high enough to get in to **Creux**. This route also avoids any queuing. Note the chair stops for lunch. Alternatively from Mottaret centre take the very fast Pas du Lac Gondola (10 mins) up to the very top of Saulire (2738m). Here you have two choices for the descent to 1850.

From the top of Saulire you have the popular **Combe Saulire** the long north-facing run direct to 1850 centre. As you ski down, look up to your left and you will see the infamous **Courchevel Couloirs**. The **Grand Couloir** is a **black** which is not actually too bad. Although it develops large moguls the snow condition is usually very good. The narrow ridge you have to traverse to get to it is more frightening than the run itself. The others are strictly off piste. We have done all of them, but only with a mountain guide (and a rope!). The **Combe Saulire** piste usually has excellent snow (It gets very little sun) but becomes extremely busy as the day goes on. It's not a good idea to ski all the way down to the 1850 centre. This is where you always find heavy congestion. Depending on your destination you can take either Biolley chair towards 1650 or Coqs towards Meribel. Biolley is also often fairly busy but the queue moves fast and note there is a single skier channel. If you are on your own take it. Even if there are two of you take it and split up. This singles system works really well on this fast 4 man chair.

An alternative run down to 1850 from Saulire is **Creux**. This piste is east facing and gets the sun in the morning. It's a fabulous long run down to the Chanrossa Chair and is also the quickest route over towards 1650. Creux Noirs and Marmottes chair lifts give you a choice of more excellent **reds** in this part of the valley.

Lunch: Courchevel 1850 is notoriously expensive for lunch. If your wallet is stuffed with valid gold credit cards then this area is no problem to you. However if 40 quid for a couple of omelets and bottle of house plonk is not to your taste then be very wary over here.

L'Arc-En-Ciel.. At the base of Saulire cable car. A reasonable priced little family restaurant with very reasonably priced plat du jour at and inexpensive house wine by the carafe. It also has a budget self service takeaway section down below plus a great sun terrace facing up towards the Courchevel Couloirs. This is always our no 1 choice in this area. Reservations: Tel 04 79 08 38 09.

Courchevel 1650:

The quickest route is up to Saulire then down **Creux** and take Chanrossa chair lift. This brings you directly in to the 1650 ski area and a wide choice of relaxing **easy blues**, plus three excellent comfortable red runs, **Chapelets, Bel Air, and Rochers**. This is a wonderful quiet section of the 3 valleys. No crowds, fabulous snow conditions. It's a long trek over (about 1 hour from Meribel) but

well worth it. if you have children be sure to take them down "**Indians**" a wonderful **blue** track through the forest. They will love all the small jumps on the right hand side! "**Indians**" starts just to the right side of the Casserole restaurant. You will see the large notice board with a story of the Sioux Indian tribe on it. on it. Take your camera as there are authentic Indian tepees pitched up on route in the forest, and make sure your kids pose by the large "Buffalo". In addition, on large colorful notice boards there are some more interesting and sad true history of the north American Indian tribes. "**Indians**" is the most interesting route down to the centre of 1650. Once there you will find relaxing **easy blues** in all directions. This area really is the quietest in all 3 valleys.

Lunch: La Petite Savoyard Our choice over here is one of the best-kept secrets in the 3 valleys. Walk through the buildings just to the right of the Ariondaz gondola by the Hotel Golf. Cross the main street to your right at 45 degrees and there it sits hidden in the corner. Fabulous 2 course lunches. Reservations essential. (Last lunch served 2pm). There is no terrace but it does have a table for 5-6 outside. Very highly recommended. Tel. 04 79 08 27 44

Bel Air This is a famous restaurant, at the top of the chair lift of the same name. It has excellent food and a fabulous sun terrace. It can be just a little expensive so don't drop in if you are on a tight budget. Reservations are always necessary. Tel: 04 79 08 00 93.

Be sure to allow at least one hour for the trip back to the Meribel valley.

Homeward Route from Courcheval:

Take the Ariondaz Gondola out 1650, then the Combes drag lift, and follow the signs for **Roc Mugnier** a **red piste** down to Gravelles chair. Take note: This piste is quite steep at the beginning and usually icy in the afternoons. You can avoid the top by taking the **Gravelles** (a bit flat!) route, which rejoins it just above the chairs at the bottom. Next take the Suisses Chair lift next for Vizelle. La Viselle is the quickest way back to the Saulire side of Meribel and Mottaret.

The top of Saulire can be congested and icy late in the afternoon but take your time and stay to the left side pistes as you go down the hill. Do not take the Mauduit run as this will take you lower down to Meribel. Half way down at the top of **Pas du Lac 1** bubble look out for **Aigle** piste and this take you into Mottaret.

Le Praz.

If the snow is good try to get down to this lovely little unspoilt village. Note: In early or late season the runs down to the village are often lacking in snow cover. If snow conditions are poor be sure to give it a miss or you will find rocks, ice and tree stumps on the lower sections.

So assuming good snow conditions ,try **Jockeys** or **Murettes** all the way down. Another interesting **Red** is **Brigues**. (although a little steep). As with the others it runs all the way down to the village. All these pistes although steep are truly beautiful in new fresh snow, running right through the forest. They are well worth doing at least once and are usually extremely quiet. If you are up to it try **Jean Blanc** too. As you reach the village you will be justly rewarded by a wonderful lunch.

Lunch: La Table De Mon Grand Pere. The very best place in La Praz for a good value meal. Excellent food. It's worth coming down to Le Praz just for lunch. This restaurant is truly excellent. Be sure to reserve in good time as it gets completely full most days. Tel: 04 79 08 41 42

La Tania.

The easiest route to La Tania is from Meribel. Take Rhodos gondola from Chaudanne then ski down to the Loze chair (very slow) at the **Altiport**. At the top you have the choice of a steep black or medium steep **red** both running down to the Le Bouc Blanc restaurant.

Here you can try **Folyeres** and **Moretta** Blanche. Both are excellent runs that go all the way down to La Tania centre. **Folyeres** is a real fun rollercoaster. Beware it can get a bit icy and worn at the bottom. Take the route on the far left side of the piste if so.

Lunch: Le Bouc Blanc restaurant A wonderful excellent value restaurant with exceptional food and a fabulous giant sun terrace.

St Martin De Belleville:

This is a beautiful little 14th century village.

Take the Tournètte Gondola from Chaudanne to the top stage. If it's busy take the Plan de l'Homme fast chair then the Tournètte drag lift up to Le Crêtes restaurant. Ski **Pramint** first as it joins the 2nd stage chair lift coming out of St Martin. Then go back up and try **Jerusalem**, which will take you right down to **biolley** and then on lower to the old Village. These runs are all excellent and usually not crowded. On the narrow pathway you will see an old village far down to your left. This is St Marcel not St Martin! You must continue much further. Eventually hang a sharp right immediately after the small tunnel that goes under the main road from Moutiers to Val Thorens. Only then you will see the old 17th century church in the village centre. There is a short steepish drag lift that brings you back out of the old village.

Lunch: La Voute: In the square opposite the church. Fabulous food. (The best ducks leg in the world). If you eat outside in early season be sure to choose a table at either end of the terrace depending on the time. When the sun disappears behind the church steeple it is absolutely **freezing!** In spring it does not matter. Reservations: Tel 04 79 08 91 48.

La Montagnard: This restaurant is half way down the draglift on the far right side and set among a row of old houses. Until 6 years ago it was the same. The grandparents house along with their cows !! All living in the same old stone barn. It has truly fabulous food and still the same wonderful ancient interior. Note: there is no sun terrace but don't let that put you off. Early reservations are absolutely essential here. Tel: 04 79 01 08 40

Les Menuires:1850m:

It takes only 35 minutes to get to Les Menuires center from Meribel. Catch the Tournètte gondola to the top then follow Gros Tougne all the way down. On the way, at the base of the Grand Luc fast 6 man chair you will pass a wonderful mountain restaurant of the same name. Take note of this one. We found superb food with the plat du jour exceptional value, as is the quality wine list. The lady hostess is charm itself, plus it also has 5 star toilets. Exceptionally clean and modern with very thoughtful non slip steps leading down to them. This restaurant is only a few years old and well worth a visit if you have not done so already.

From Mottaret catch Plattieres gondola to and then take **Allamands**. It's a fast run and is not usually too busy. Then drop down on **Grandes Combes** to **Gros Tougne** again for the run in to Les Menuires.

Alternatively take the Combes Chair then Roc de Tougne double drag lift. Ski down **Pramint** and then join **Gros Tougne** once more.

Sadly the Les Menuires resort centre is truly ugly, but this area also has some really superb skiing, especially over on La Masse. Bear right in the centre through the buildings, which takes you down to Masse 1 gondola. Next take Masse 2 the second highest bubble in the 3 valleys. At the top you have two excellent pistes: **Crêtes** and **Covili Fred**. Both are North facing and they usually have an excellent snow base. Also behind La Masse is one of the best **itineraries** in all 3 valleys. It is not too difficult, usually well worn and easy to find. It follows a route that brings you back round to the front of the mountain ending alongside **Lac Du Lou**.

The **reds** below Mont de la Chambre are also usually fairly quiet and make excellent cruising especially the **4 vents** piste .

Lunch: La Ferme : From La Masse head back down to Les Menuires via **Les Enverses** & **Bvd Inverse**. Take the Doron Chair lift, jump off to your right , then ski down **Boyes** to Reberly village. This Pub / Restaurant then appears on your right. It is a great lunch spot in the sun, with very friendly service, great mountain views and superb food. Also great steak in onions (our favorite). Best value lunch in Les Menuires. Tel: 04 79 00 77 01

Another good choice is **Chalet 2000** situated under the Doron chair serving wonderful food, especially the plat du jour. If service seems a little brusque sometimes that is because the waiter is always so busy. Take no notice, just enjoy the fine quality of the food. Tel: 04 79 0060 57 for reservations. (essential)

Hotel L'ours Blanc: A little more up market but also absolutely excellent. (renowned for it's T Bone Steaks). This hotel restaurant has the most charming English lady owner, very friendly service and good value. Well worth a visit. You will find it just below Chalet 2000 on the same piste under the Doron chair.

Homeward route from Les Menuires:

The best ski run back is to take the Bruyeres gondola all the way to the top of Mont de la Chambre. Then a long red, **Lac de la Chambre** to the blue **Ours** run all the way to Mottaret. If it's a cold day drop in to the Zig Zag bar as you reach Mottaret for the only hot genuine Austrian "Jaeger Tea" in the valley.

Val Thorens:

Take Plattieres gondola to the 2nd stage then take **Bouvreuil** or go to the 3rd and top stage and take **Cote Brune**. Both are excellent runs that catch the morning sun and will take you direct down to Cote Brune Chair. This long cold chair will in due course get you to the top of Mont de la Chambre (2860m) and in to the VT valley.

As you enter Val Thorens you have a very short **black run**, which is quite easy early morning in good snow conditions, but very icy later. This joins **Plein Sud** for the easy trip down to VT centre. The alternative, depending on your desired destination is to take the long **Pluviometre** run down but take note that this piste ends up far below the centre. You will then have to walk 100m up to Cascades chair and/or Pecllet Funitel or take the Plein Sud chairlift if you want to ski the far left

side of the valley. However this blue route does whisk you down to the Caron gondola which connects with the Cime de Caron cable car.

If it is your first trip to VT then be sure to take a trip up to the Cime de Caron. There is always a queue for this giant cable car but as it holds 160 people it never takes too long. The views are fantastic at the top (3200m) with a giant compass showing all the other major resorts in the Alps. It is always cold up here so wrap up warm. There is a small restaurant hut at the top for hot drinks.

Take the **Col De L'audzin**, a wonderful long run all the way down to the cable car base. Also the **Combe-de-Caron**, although black, is not actually too steep for confident intermediates. All the snow on this section is usually in excellent condition.

There is also now also a superb long **black** run over the other side in the 4th valley. The **Combe Rosael**, that used to be strictly off piste, now drops down to join **Mauriennaise** for the final route to Orelle (900m). So a full 2300m descent in one go! Well worth doing and as a bonus by the time you get reach this piste you will normally find it in basking in full sunshine.

Given time another excellent choice is to take the Funitel Grand Fond and drop in to the 4th valley for a full 2100m run down to Orelle on the **Mauriennaise**.

Up in this corner of VT is also another fairly quite excellent **red**. Take the **Boismint** chair then ski the piste of the same name. It's long, fast and we have never known it to be really busy.

VT really is an such an excellent place to ski ! More of the good stuff is to be found at the far left end of the valley. **"Col"** for example over by Pte de Thorens (3266m). Really this whole area, together with the **reds, Christine, Beranger, Lac Blanc**, reached by the Peclet Funitel always have excellent snow and are normally very quiet. Val Thorens definitely warrants more than just one day trip from Mottaret.

Lunch:

Pop back to VT centre and jump on Cascades chairlift. Ski off down to the right on **Dalles** and you will come across **La Marine** on the right side of the piste. A great sun terrace and great food. Choose the Plat du Jour. (especially if its Coq u Vin) It also a much cheaper self-service section downstairs. Tel 04 79 00 03 12. If you are on a very tight budget drop in to the VT centre where you will find cheap takeaway burger/sandwiches bars in ready supply.

Homeward Route:1

This trip home is interesting but very tiring. It's about 7 km to Mottaret and takes about 1 hour so don't leave it too late. This route gets very crowded from 3.30pm onwards and is mainly shaded from the sun so is also very cold in early season.

Take 3 Vallees 1 or Plein Sud chairlift out of VT then the Bouquetin Funitel back to Meribel valley and home via **Lac de la Chambre** and keep going all the way to Mottaret on the **Ours** blue run.

Homeward Route: 2

Another interesting, more relaxing alternative is to take the very easy **Boulevard Cumin** to Les Menuires. Then take the Doron chairlift. Ski down to Les Menuires centre and take the Mont de la Chambre out. You can then ski **Venturon** which doesn't get much traffic and work your way down to Mottaret from there. This route is easier on the legs but takes about 1h.30 so again leave plenty of time.