



Fun and friendship in the French Alps

Samoëns is a French Alpine resort located in the Vallée du Giffre in south-eastern France.

It has been designated a ville fleurie for the way the community comes together to improve the quality of life here and enhance the towns attractiveness to visitors.

Samoëns is also the only winter sports resort to be classified by the Caisse Nationale des Monuments Historiques.

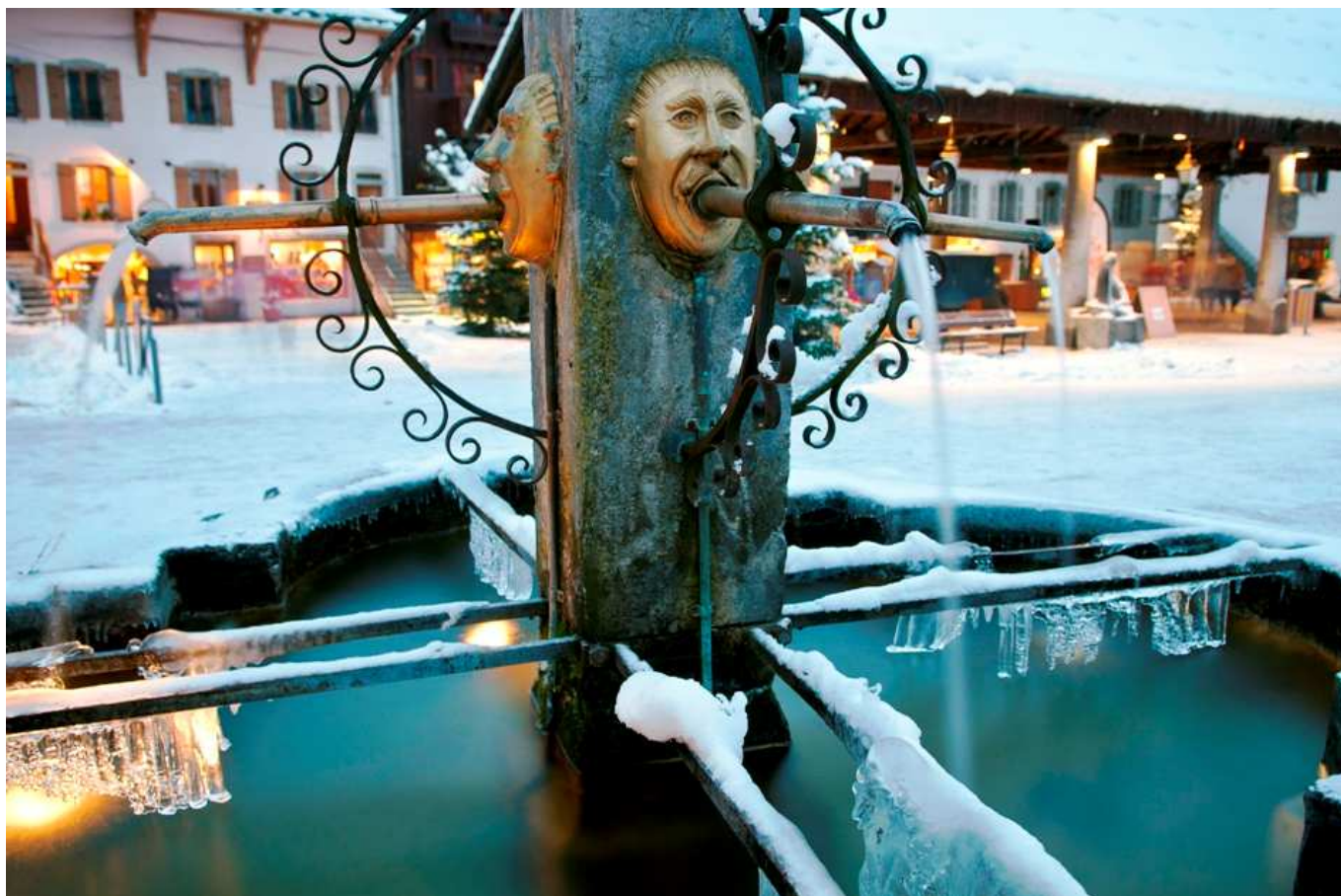
During the spring and summer months, Samoëns makes for a fine base for Alpine hiking, cycling, rock and mountain climbing and river pursuits.

During the winter season, Samoëns forms part of the larger Grand Massif ski area.

This brings together five resorts and offers exceptional skiing for all levels and a range of other snowbound pursuits.

Ashley Gibbins
Commissioning Editor
AllWays traveller





A trio of firsts makes my stay

By Ashley Gibbins

As we left Samoëns, for the 90 minute drive back to Geneva airport, I was still glowing with an inner pride at having ticked three new activities off the 'to do' list.

And all on a first visit to a place that had quickly become somewhere special.

Of these, the highlight was undoubtedly led by my taking to snow on a pair of skis, followed by a morning Afghan walking and e-fat biking through the snow by moonlight.

But more than that it was the people we met during our time at Samoëns that made it all the more rewarding.

Perhaps it's because the continuing prosperity of this small, and tightly knit, community is now intrinsically tied into tourism, or maybe it's because people here are just so naturally friendly.

Either way, we really did feel a genuine warmth in the welcome we received - and this makes all the difference.

I know that 'people make places' is a veritable mantra of mine, but it is so true - and particularly true of those we met in Samoëns, be it in the hotel, restaurants and shops or on the slopes.

A valley for the bourgeoisie

Samoëns was at one time a 'bour' village in an Alpine valley that prospered by serving the farming families who lived a struggling, and scattered, existence on the lower slopes of the surrounding mountains.

The residents of Samoëns, the 'bourgeoisie' or middle class, provided a market place for those wishing to buy and sell produce and obtain other goods and services.

Samoëns still stages a thriving farmers market, in its town square every Wednesday, although this has become as much a social gathering as a source of life's imperatives.

The first tourists

Tourism first came to Samoëns around 1800, when this part of the French Alps began to attract visitors wishing to embrace the fresh and vigorous mountain walks in spring and summer.

The area offered this in abundance without the overcrowding of the nearby Mont Blanc region.

And so Samoëns geared up to meet the dining and accommodation needs of these new tourists before all but hibernating again, under its blanket of snow, during the winter months.

The skiers arrive

It would be another 100 years before the skiing fraternity discovered Samoëns but, again, they were welcomed.

The first ski lift opened in 1950, and it was then that Samoëns became fully able to meet the needs of snow season visitors.

The Samoëns visitor split now tends to be evenly distributed between the ski season, which runs from just before Christmas to April, and the summer trade from July to September.

Samoëns is also finding visitors see it as a fine short break destination during the spring months of May and June and in Autumn.

www.samoens.com



The Samoëns winter season starts just before Christmas and runs to 21 April.

During this time there's the chance to enjoy a complete range winter sports with skiing, by far, the most popular.

Samoëns is part of the Grand Massif ski domain that also includes Les Carroz, Morillon, Vernant, Sixt Fer à Cheval and the Flaine.

Given the absolute novice nature of my skiing ability, I can not personally vouch the quality of the slopes.

However, I was reliably informed by those who come here regularly that the Grand Massif area provides an excellent range of on, off and between piste skiing.

And being the Alps the scenery through 360 degrees is stunning.

High five's with the six year old's

Before taking my first ski lesson on the nursery slopes at Samoëns, I had, like Hercules, to achieve three tasks (OK, I know he had to complete 12, but mine were just as difficult).

First task was to get fitted for and into my ski boots. The guys at Intersport were very patient with me, even when I immediately make the cardinal error of having two pairs of socks on.

A real no, no as this can cause severe rubbing.

An embarrassing start! But even Franz Klammer will have made silly mistakes at the start of his skiing 'loge'.

Strapped tightly into the necessarily 'lead heavy' boots, I just about managed to climb onboard the shuttle bus, but then needed to get off and clump from the car park to the cable car entrance.

www.samoens-intersport.com/en/

These boots not made for walking

The second task, walking in very heavy ski boots.

While even practiced proponents find it difficult to look elegant doing so, I gave a good impression of a lame duck with haemorrhoids. And it also ached.

And finally, with my ski's waving about with a life of their own, I needed to slot them into the exterior rack and clamber aboard a moving cable car.

I will leave the farce that ensued to your imagination. I wish to forget it.

And so we head up into the mountains and I am introduced to Ivan, our personal trainer.

And that's when things really began to look up.

We joined a group of six year old children on the nursery slopes.

They were also learning to ski, with their trainer, and were obviously amused to see this 'old fellow' with a nervous grimace trying to do the same.

And while things started shakily our confidence grew.

At the end of the three hours of Ivan's personal training, I was able to slalom from the top to the nursery slope to the bottom (eat you heart out Hercules).

And did I feel proud when receiving a big high five from the little six year girl who had followed me down.

My first time skiing was exhilarating and left me realising that the more I do this, the better I will get and the more rewarding my experiences on the slopes will become.



This was the place to give skiing another go

By Ann Mealor

I went skiing 16 years ago and it wasn't the best of experiences. Very high, lots of ice, not much snow – not suitable for a beginner, which was a shame as I thought I would really enjoy skiing and be good at it. Unfortunately, neither was the case.

However, when the opportunity came up to give skiing another go, I decided to take it.

Ashley and I both fall into the category of 'mature beginners' and I did wonder if we would enjoy it and I was worried about falling and getting injured.

I'm pleased to say none of my fears materialised and I enjoyed every minute of my snow time.

Samoëns is ideal for the inexperienced as there are lots of gentle green runs and plenty of snow.

We hired our equipment in Samoëns - helmet, skis, poles and boots - all were in very good condition, in fact, my boots were new.

Up into the mountains

We headed to the lifts (it only takes eight minutes to reach the nursery slopes) feeling like spacemen making our first moon walk dressed in our padded jackets and weighty boots – it took a while to get used to walking in them.

In Samoëns, the nursery slopes are separated from other ski runs so beginners can ski in complete safety without worrying about crashing into others.

Yvan the wonderful

Once at the top of the mountain, we met our instructor Yvan.

He was so friendly and positive that he made Ashley and I feel relaxed from the word go.

First of all, he got us used to our equipment; how to put on our skis, get them off and how to walk in them.

When we reached the top of the beginners' slope, it looked so steep, I thought "We are never going to get down that."

However, one at a time, Yvan showed us how to do the snow plough and how to stop.

He held onto us as we made our first unsteady slides mid-way down the slope to the bottom of the people mover.

It's like the ones you find at airports) you just stand on it in your skis and it takes you back to the top of the mountain.

We did this a few times and with Yvan's help and instruction, Ashley and I grew more confident.

Yvan then showed us how to shift our weight and use the edge of our skis and soon we were making wide turns down our nursery slope.

Eventually we skied on our own to the very bottom and came back up via the Button Lift, which can be tricky for the beginner to negotiate, but we both made it, in a fashion!

We both thoroughly enjoyed our skiing and would definitely recommend having a private instructor.



Ashley hit the white stuff just twice - once, on the slope and once on the Button Lift.

However, the snow was soft and powdery and Yvan hoisted him back on his skis without too much difficulty. I stayed upright for the whole of my session which I was smugly pleased about!

By the end of our three hours on the Samoëns slopes, Ashley and I were skiing converts.

And we can't wait to pick up where we left off next year!



Breathing in the fresh air on an Afghan walk

A wonderful clear blue morning in Samoëns was spent taking a truly invigorating Afghan walk in the snow with Claire Phillipczyk who runs Nature Quintessence.

Claire is a dedicated proponent of this type of exercise and it really helped.

Following a stunning drive up into the mountains, we strapped on our snow shoes (an absolute doddle after the ski boots) and I was ready for the off.

But first Claire explained how we were about to embark on 'active meditation' and this needed a little preparation.

One might easily be cynical at the thought, but not with Claire in charge.

Thanks due to the Maldars

She explained the name derives from the Maldars nomads in the highlands of Afghanistan.

When walking is the only way to get around, they combine a method that is physically energy efficiency and mentally relaxing.

Still not convinced? Well the Maldars can walk up to 700 km in less than 12 days (including nocturnal bivouacs) and at very high altitude.

That's 60 km per a day.

For our morning Afghan walking in the French Alps we start with a self- massage by tapping all parts of the body, from the head down, before shaking ones arms and loudly exhaling.



Breathing through the nose

Why getting the breathing right was the next thing to understand.

We tend to breath through the mouth, particularly when exerting ourselves is, whereas with Afghan walking the aim is to breathe through the nose.

Also to take in out breaths in time with the steps taken.

The result is being able to walk faster and further without getting tired.

Apart from the most strenuous part of our walk, when I naturally gulped air through the mouth, it works.

And what a glorious way to spend a morning, with the snow covered slopes sparkling white from the bright sunlight in a clear blue sky and the majestic Mont Blanc in the distance.



And us at true peace with our surroundings.

And no I was not tired at the end of our two hour Afghan walk min the mountains.

Back in the UK Ann and I are regular walkers through Epping Forest with our Nordic poles. Except we are now Afghan walkers.

Claire also offers other relaxation pursuits in the outdoors including yoga and meditation.

www.nature-quintessence.fr



Pedal and battery power with Mountain Spirit

It was a case of easy does it as we took a moonlit fat bike ride into the woodlands around Samoëns.

Cycling through the snow, by moonlight, on an electric bike with 'fat' tires was my third first and came courtesy of the guys at Mountain Spirit.

Bertrand, Jonathan and Thomas set up their operation two years ago to help make it easier for visitors to appreciate the forests, lakes and mountains here.

In the fresh air year round

Catering for winter and summer sports enthusiasts, Mountain Spirit welcomes those of all ages and abilities in offering mountain biking, skiing, hiking, mountaineering and canyoning.

All the equipment needed is provided.

In the time we had, the e-bike option was ideal - and so much fun.

Again, my being an absolute novice on an e-bike was soon clear.

I assumed you cycled until tired before switching to electric power and just sitting there as it took over.

Pedal and battery in tandem

Of course I now know that pedal and battery power both operate in tandem to make cycling a quite effortless experience.

And it certainly was as we cycled along a snow covered track through the woods.



Much of this took place after dark and the effect was a little surreal (not unlike opening to ET).

The bikes fat tyres really took on the rough terrain with relish.

The one moment (that I would prefer not to record) was trying to pedal across a field of deep snow.

While the rest of our group managed it successfully I came to a halt, even on turbo power, before collapsing in a heap.

Bertrand, who was with us, explained it was probably because I was heavier than everyone else so my bike sank deeper into the snow. It did not help.

Looking forward to the next time

All in all it was a tremendous experience and I think I would really enjoy a longer, summer time, trip into the mountains on my fat bike.

www.mountainspirit-sports.com/en





A warming winter welcome at Les Glaciers

By Ann Mealor



Situated in the centre of Samoëns the quaint and homely Hotel Les Glaciers is well placed for local shops, restaurants, bars and most importantly, the ski lift.

Built out of wood and stone, the rustic chalet also has a cosy outdoor lounge bar, perfect for an après ski gluwain in winter and a chilled glass of wine in summer.

There is also a swimming pool, sauna, tennis and a private garden for guests to enjoy, depending on the season.

The bedrooms

Our pine clad room was large, warm and furnished with pretty heart decorated curtains and cushions – the heart is the symbol of Samoëns .

We had a small balcony with views over the snow covered town and a little seating area with two comfortable leather chairs.

Breakfast

Breakfast was just right with a help yourself buffet of breads, yoghurt, juices, cheeses, cold meats, pastries and freshly boiled eggs.

You could certainly fill up on enough to see you through a mornings skiing.

We enjoyed two delicious lunches at Les Glaciers too – platters of local meats and cheeses with crusty bread, salad and red wine.

The staff here are all very friendly and happy to help out in any way they can. Many visitors arrive as guests and leave as friends.



www.hotellesglaciers.com

Dining in Samoëns is something to cherish

By Ann Mealor

Being France you expect the cuisine to be top notch, but in Samoëns it is the genuine warmth of the welcome that makes dining an exceptional pleasure

We were lucky enough to dine at two wonderful restaurants.

Le 8M des Monts



Le 8M des Monts is run by the delightful Angelique and her fine chef husband Hugues.

Using fresh, seasonal products - many organic - this modern, friendly restaurant in the centre of town serves a variety of creative and classic homemade dishes.

Works from local artists hang on the walls and the short menu, which changes a little every day, is written in chalk on a large blackboard.

While deciding what to choose, we tucked into the freshly baked organic bread and tried Orchis an excellent and rare, local white wine.

For starters, Ashley went for cheese in filou pastry and I chose the cauliflower soup served with a swirl of olive oil.

Both meals were tastefully presented and dishes were scraped clean.

For mains we both chose the spicy vegetable curry topped with pollock.

The organic roasted hazelnuts were a tasty surprise and gave the dish a flavoursome crunch.

For dessert Ashley chose the lemon curd crumble with Chantilly cream.

Served in a tumbler, it was a light, citrusy, dreamy delight.

I went for the warm chocolate cake with almonds and crème Anglaise.

Unusually, it was topped with parsnip ice cream and crispy parsnip crisps.

The quirky combination was a hit, especially when accompanied by a glass of sweet, organic regional wine.

The restaurant is petit so ideal for couples and small groups.



Fifine's Table



Fifine's Table, which is run by Karine and Philippe Noblet, enjoys a typical, regional Savoyard setting.

It is a large, cheerful restaurant with snug, cushion filled alcoves, a log burning fire and gleaming copper pots and jugs hanging from its wooden beams.

All the food is freshly prepared and there are plenty of authentic flavours on the menu.

The wine list is extensive and there is a great selection of regional wines.

Ashley and I chose the heart warming French Onion soup for starters. It was a house speciality and came recommended.

It didn't disappoint.

It was a meal in itself served in a brown, glazed pot with soft onions and a thick crust of cheese - a winning combination.

For mains I went for the traditional three cheese fondue laced with wine from the Savoie, a green salad and crusty cubes of bread.

Presented in a cast iron dish, it was absolutely addictive.

I didn't stop eating until every piece of bread had gone. Traditional fare and its best.

Ashley went for the scallops which were plump and juicy and well presented.

We both finished our meal with a slice of melt-in-the-mouth rebuchon cheese and a shot of the fruity, but very strong local liqueur.

The large alcoves are just right for family gatherings or catch-ups with groups of friends.

www.table-fifine.com



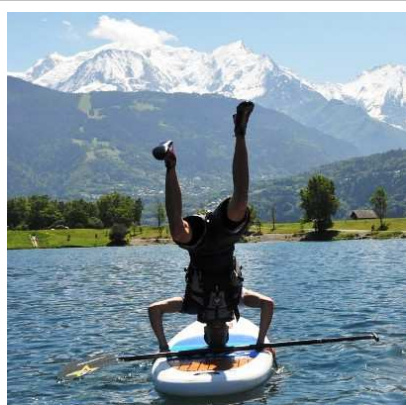
Mountain pursuits in the Samoëns spring and summer

When the snows melt, there is a short lull in Samoëns before it bursts into life once again.

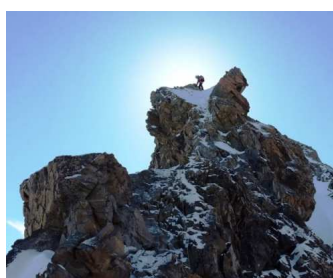
Every conceivable pursuit is available for those looking to get up into the mountains.

Walking, hiking, cycle and mountain bike routes make it easy to choose the right pursuit, and there are many opportunities to get wet and wild.

www.summer.samoens.com



A snapshot of winter in Samoëns



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Ann Mealar is a professional travel writer and photographer and Managing Editor of *AllWays traveller*



Ashley Gibbins is a professional travel writer and photographer and Managing Director of the International Travel Writers Alliance.