

TRAVEL FACTS

A self-catering apartment for four people (max six) for one week, at Pop Alp Hotel, its €3,800
A double room for two at 4-star Pop Alp Hotel is from €300 per night

La Plagne ski passes are priced €70 per day, or €359 for six days
At Ski Hut ski shop, it's only €10-14 a day to hire skis and boots

Travelski Night Express is €80 (single) Eurostar from London to Paris, prices from £66 (one way)
Return train from Glasgow to London is £83.90



Travel news

Across New England, the six states will host celebrations to commemorate the USA's 250th anniversary.

Visit the picturesque towns of Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts, and discover more about the first shots of the revolution with tours by the Lexington Visitor Centre, which offers a costumed guided Battle Green Colonial walking tour, a trolley tour and self-guided resources.

There will be a Battle of Tower Hill Re-enactment on April 12 where visitors can dive into the rich tapestry of the town's history and join in marking this significant milestone.

In Connecticut, stop by the Yale University Visitor Center. Yale is the alma mater of 10 Founding Fathers; five of whom signed the Declaration of Independence.

In Vermont, history enthusiasts can discover more about some of the significant wars in American history including the French and Indian, the Revolutionary and the War of 1812 at the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum. Celebrate the anniversary of the arrival of the Declaration of



Independence to New Hampshire in 1776 at the 36th American Independence Festival. While in New Hampshire, visit Strawberry Banke, an open-air museum with 32 historic buildings located in a historic waterfront neighbourhood. The living museum interprets 350 years of history with costumed actors, demonstrations and heirloom gardens.

The Fort Knox Historic Site and Penobscot Narrows Bridge & Observatory in Maine is the tallest public bridge observatory in the world.

Visitors can explore the grounds, interact with the knowledgeable guides and learn more about its role in regional defence.

In Rhode Island, join Tall Ships, Twelve Metres and World-Class Racing Sailboats at a one-of-a-kind regatta in the sailing capital of the world on June 5. This spectacular event will commemorate 250 years of American and Rhode Island history, while looking ahead to the future of climate action on World Environment Day. discovernewengland.org

To find out more about the celebrations and events being planned throughout the year as America turns 250, go to america250.org

'Débutante' skier Laura Coventry hits the slopes in La Plagne, the perfect resort for beginners, cheese lovers and anyone with an eye for a sustainable destination



SMITTEN: Laura, below, fell in love with skiing – and the apres-ski cheese – at La Plagne, where she stayed at the landmark Pop Alp hotel, bottom, and explored some of the vast Paradiski area of which the resort is a part, left.



There used to be a certain elitism around skiing, a snow sport once favoured exclusively by the affluent. That's all changed, as I discovered when I was invited to a "more affordable and accessible" ski resort in the French Alps, La Plagne.

As a beginner (or 'débutante'), I have felt intimidated learning to ski in some resorts, but alongside my trusted instructor Carla from ski school École du Ski Français (ESF), I felt relaxed and comfortable; like I was meant to be there.

On day one it was a perfect powder day, and Carla's patience allowed me to progress from the nursery slope on to two of the area's 73 blue runs! And I said 'au revoir' to the magic carpet, as Carla had me jumping on

and off chair lifts and 'button lifts' as we ascended the piste. I looked like I knew what I was doing, until I tried to sit down on the button lift and almost face-planted in the snow!

"Have you tried Reblochon, Beaufort or Raclette?" asked Carla as I glided down with my skis parallel. My instructor's distraction technique stopped the overthinking – the stunning scenery surrounding me was also a welcome distraction.

La Plagne – an alpine resort comprising 10 villages and one town – is "not only about downhill skiing", so says its website. So, keen to try some other winter sports, I signed up for snowshoe trekking. Guide Raphael Chenal helped me strap on the huge snowshoes. We set off from Plagne-Villages (altitude 2,068m), which hosted a Tour de France stage finish last year, trudging

through one-metre-deep snow to reach the peak. En route, Raphael explained the rare geological formations and the danger of 'sinkholes' in this landscape. I felt I looked the part, with my walking poles and snowshoes, but quickly learned that metre-deep snow is soft and, while it may cushion your fall, it won't stop you falling over!

Later, I was safely back at the ultra-modern four-star Pop Alp Hotel. Inspired by pop art, the 13-storey development only opened in late December – a few weeks before I arrived – after an existing hotel building was renovated and extended upwards (not outwards), embracing "vertical architecture". Few hotels are as striking as the Pop Alp, I conclude as I walk up the stairs to reception, below a gondola suspended from the ceiling. You can't miss its colourful bobble hats logo on the side, making it easy to spot from the

mountains or chairlift. Inside, the hotel rooms and apartments are freshly decorated, adorned with colourful nods to the Pop Art movement, made famous by artists like Andy Warhol. During a chat with hotel director Romain Jacob, I discovered that this hotel was originally the first one to be built in La Plagne in the 1960s and its brightly coloured designs – and ski clock in reception – were created by local designer Fabrice Peltier.

Now, I'd heard that the bobsleigh run where France hosted the Winter Olympics in 1992 was located just over four kilometres from where I was staying. Next day, I headed there to experience it. Repurposing and reusing are something of a theme here, as I discovered, as the 1.5km bobsleigh track is being reused and will soon be renovated. This very bobsleigh run – which staged Albertville 1992 Olympics – will also host

the Winter Olympics when France hosts it in 2030. Imagine my excitement, then, when I was strapped into a bob raft! My four-man team hurtled down France's only bobsleigh run at 80km per hour (50mph), taking just over 100 seconds to reach the finish. It's not for the faint-hearted but is exhilarating, and those even more courageous can opt for a faster piloted bobsleigh, which is controlled at 120kph (75mph) by some of the country's top bobsleigh champions.

It's not just Pop Alp doing its bit for eco responsibility, explained Estelle Chatellier from the Mountain Riders Association. The organisation created Le Flocon Vert (Green Snowflake) award to recognise mountain tourist destinations that are committed to sustainability and reducing carbon footprint during "the ecological transition".

Before I even arrived in La Plagne, I was

embracing eco-responsibility by travelling by train (five, in total) from Scotland to the French Alps. Train two was the new electric Lumo train to London King's Cross. Besides being run on electricity, it features paperless tickets and bans the sale of plastic bottles on board. Train four was the Eurostar from London's St Pancras to Paris – which travels around 300kph (186mph) and 100 metres below sea level – before Travelski Express's overnight sleeper train.

On the Parisian platform, I got chatting to the chief executive of Travelski partner Pegasus. "It's retro innovation," he said before explaining how this train had been repurposed. Inside, there are six-berth sleeping compartments. It's cosy, not costly; basic, not bougie. And visiting the on-board dining car, I headed to my vintage-style cabin, before waking up (nine hours after departing

Paris) and pulling into the beautiful snow-covered Aime-la-Plagne, which resembles a railway station from a Hallmark Christmas movie.

Wondering if I was inspired by ski instructor Carla's Alpine cheese chat on our descent down the mountain? I was. On the last night, I discovered a delightful little bistro called La Marmotte in Aime 2000. By day, it boasts spectacular views of Mont Blanc. By night, it has an intimate feel, and a menu featuring many different types of raclette.

Truffle raclette jumped out. When it arrived with its vertical heater, I could not contain my excitement as I scraped off the golden gooey cheese!

So, 'cheese and skis' perfectly sum up my long weekend in the amazing, affordable and accessible La Plagne.