

Title:

Les Houches - The Hidden Gem Of The Chamonix Valley.

Word Count:

578

Summary:

Les Houches has long been overlooked due to its illustrious neighbour - Chamonix. Now, however, Les Houches is a holiday destination in its own right.

Keywords:

les houches, holidays, vacations, france, skiing, ski, snowboarding, summer, winter, alps

Article Body:

In the heart of the French Alps, in the north east of the Rhone Alps region lies the village of Les Houches. Nestled at one end of the Chamonix valley in the Mont Blanc region of the Haute Savoie Les Houches had long been the considered a mere satellite village of its much more illustrious neighbour Chamonix - the world capital of skiing and mountaineering. Of course the locals knew better and many high mountain guides, ski instructors and pisteurs had long since migrated to this quite and peaceful corner of the Chamonix valley - drawn as much, perhaps, by it's magnificent setting at the foot of Mont Blanc, it's peace, tranquillity and traditional ambience as its more affordable property. However, it wasn't long before the resort became recognised as a little gem in the centre of the Mont Blanc Massif and tourism bloomed due in a large part to Les Houches' incredibly easy access to and from Geneva airport.

It wasn't always so. It was only with the construction of the new road between Le Fayet and Chamonix during 1860-70, and then with the arrival of the train in 1901, that Les Houches began to open up to summer tourism. It was then that Les Houches became a small holiday retreat and the first hotels and holiday homes began to appear. Les Houches first started as a winter destination with the construction of the Bellevue cable car in 1936-7. From the 1960s the growing tourism development led to the construction of new lift systems. But, it was with the digging of the Mont Blanc tunnel (1959-65) and the completion of the Route Blanche motorway in 1990 which opened up the village of Les Houches to the rest of Europe.

Situated at a height of 1000 metres Les Houches is a pleasant family resort with an exceptional panorama of the Chamonix Aiguilles which encircle the Chamonix

valley. The village is made up of a number of small hamlets, with numerous old farms and chapels and enjoys fantastic 360° views, some great tree lined skiing along trails winding through the woods (perfect for bad weather days) and two of the best on mountain restaurants in the valley.

Les Houches also has the widest variety and greatest number of runs in the Chamonix valley, offering everything from gentle greens and blues for practising your newly acquired turns on, to the world famous Kandahar - a regular feature on the FIS Men's World Cup downhill circuit. Indeed, the Kandahar is considered by many racers to be second only in difficulty to the Streif on the Hahnenkamm in Kitzbuhel. The run is 3343 metres in length with an impressive 870m of declivity and the winning time is sub two minutes. With its series of technical passages and jumps, including La Cassure and Le Goulet, the Kandahar is also considered to be one of the most beautiful downhill slopes in the world.

Les Houches offers a myriad of activities throughout the year to suit all tastes and inclinations. During the winter season, in addition to the skiing and snowboarding, Les Houches offers dog sleighing, outdoor ice skating, snowshoeing, indoor climbing, paragliding and local markets offering fresh regional produce. During the glorious summer months you can climb, trek, mountain bike, paraglide, play tennis or simply relax and enjoy the fresh mountain air and stunning scenery. Combined with a variety of bars and restaurants, shops and museums to visit and explore there should be enough to keep you occupied throughout your stay.