

South Jersey Ski Club – Val d’Isere and Copenhagen 2018

It was a lovely and sunny Friday, 26 January, when 42 SJSC skiers arrived at Newark Liberty International Airport ready to begin the first leg of a wonderful 10-day European adventure. Our departure weather was an indicator of what we would encounter for the majority of our trip, and that sunny theme continued through until the very end with a Super Bowl victory for the Philadelphia Eagles that had the fans in our midst rejoicing. The trip was indeed a great one, full of memories to savor for years to come.

After a peaceful overnight flight to Copenhagen, we quickly transferred to a short flight to Geneva, Switzerland. Upon arrival in Geneva we discovered virtually every ski group in the United Kingdom joining us in Baggage Claim! Getting in and out of there was a challenge, and then finding our bus driver an even greater challenge. Thanks to super bus scout, Don P., for zeroing in on driver Jean Claude and our bus. A 3-hour ride followed as we joined the non-stop line of traffic heading up to the incredibly snow blessed French Alps. Everyone was a bit exhausted as our bus negotiated those last few hairpin curves, but the sight of those massive piles of snow on the sides of the road and the sheer quantity on the rooftops of every building had all gasping at the record snow pack. With sunny skies forecast for the first four days of our stay, all legs were itching to do something on that snow!

Nicholas E., our fantastic hotel host, greeted us at the charming and cozy Hotel Altitude with an efficient check-in then introductory meeting and orientation. He promptly nicknamed Dale M. “The Geek”. Could an attachment to a certain black smartphone have anything to do with that? During the late afternoon, most of the group set out to pick up pre-rented skis, then prior to dinner, we were treated to a Welcome Wine and Hors d’oeuvres party by the hotel. That first taste of Chef Tibeaux’ skills let us know we would be eating very well all week!

Glorious sunshine and temperatures in the upper 20’s/low 30’s greeted us on Sunday morning, and Joe K., Eileen M., Janet D., Mark R., Bianca M., Dale M., Yan W., Debbie G., Terri C., Don B., Joe H., Cheryl R., Fred S. and Sharon B. all set out to ski together in the beautiful area, Belvedere, at the top of the Telepherique Olympique. It was a glorious day spent on long, beautiful cruisers with lots of photo ops, laughs and comradery. While up there we saw Don P. and Peter L. plus Eileen G. and Jeff T. Rumor had it that Frank D. and Jim T. were up there, too. Before dinner, our hosts small son, 3-year-old Romeo, visited the large and lovely bar/lounge where our group spent many a “happy hour” and mistook Mark R. for “Pere Noel” – aka Santa Claus! He excitedly told his father, “Papa, we have Pere Noel staying in our hotel!” Mark, of course, had to stay in character all week, and before departure, bestowed a small gift upon Romeo. Needless to say, the little guy was thrilled!

Monday brought another gorgeous day, and our ski group consisted of Mark R., Janet D., Bianca M., Dale M., Eileen M., Joe K., Joe H. who had acquired the nickname of “Sprinkles”, Cheryl R., Gerry D., Terri C., Yan W. and Don B. We decided to make the trek over to Tignes and up to La Grande Motte. The runs over were very crowded. It seemed as though all of Val had the same idea. However, once we got to the Funiculaire Perce Neige all was forgotten. That crazy yellow caterpillar shaped train is an engineering marvel running on a track inside of the mountain. It goes at speeds that equal the London Tube as it travels up, up, up to close to 12,000 feet. The views from the Belvedere up top were glorious! From there we took the Genepy to Radotch to Cairn runs that combined to make up the “Run of the Year”, and our group, that by then had shrunk to 10, had the entire run to ourselves!! A long and leisurely lunch in the sun followed at Le Chalet du Bollin before we began the long trek back to Val. We never actually made it to Tignes, but who cared?

More sun greeted us on Tuesday so what could we do but head out by 9 for a trip up the Telecabine de Solaise to ski the areas accessed there. We had a smaller group with Mark D., Janet R., Terri C., Don B., Yan W. and Italian friend Stefano M. joining Dale and Bianca M. for the day. Cheryl R., Joe H., Sean O. and John B., Marion R., Joe L. and Gene Z. and Nancy A., Jan H. and Pat T. formed other groups deciding to explore the same area. It was a 10+/10 kind of day, and everyone loved it! Ask about the Leissieres lift from Plan Milet en route to Col de L'Iseran, and you will hear tales of vertigo, closed eyes, screams and real roller coaster type thrills! Some of the group headed back to the hotel to rest after our incredibly busy day on the slopes, but Don B., Terri C., Bianca M. and Yan W. opted for a last run to CocoRico, the legendary slope side bar. There we saw Thomas A., Matt D. and Fran C. who stayed for some of that famous "tabletop" dancing. One beer was all it took for Yan W. to do some dancing of her own, but not on a table!!

What more could we want when Wednesday dawned clear and cloudless?! The areas off of Telecabine de Solaise beckoned once again. They had just been so beautiful the day before. We added Jim P., who was feeling better after a couple of days under the weather, to our group. We had a great day retracing our skiing adventure of the day before on snow that could not have been better. Yan W. was not with us this time because she had headed off for a dog sledding excursion with Suzanne D., Ronni P. and Lisa M. Others who enjoyed dog sledding during the week included Gayle E., Debbie G., Kerry D. and Mary S. Many of that group also enjoyed long walks in the snow, leisurely lunches up on sun-splashed plateaus and strolls through the lovely town of Val d'Iserre. Mary S. even took a para-skiing kite flight one afternoon!!

During the night it started to snow, and by Thursday morning the clouds were low and the snow was piling high. Many of us set out to ski despite the low clouds, but it only took one long run in the fog and deep snow off the Telepherique Olympique to send us back up and over via another Funiculaire to La Daille. We decided to try a tree-lined run or two in that lower area. Sadly, the lift lines were packed with others having the same idea, and a crowded, harrowing, basically blind run back down convinced us that skiing was not to be in the cards for Thursday. Instead the day brought shopping, errands, yummy crepe lunches and relaxation all around. Bianca M., Yan W., Terri C., Don B., Mark R. and Janet D. opted for a visit to the Aquasportif Centre, and that was glorious. The jets in the huge pool felt so good as did the heat of the sauna and steam rooms. The snow just kept falling, but it was forecast to stop during the night with more sun to follow. Thoughts of the "freshies" to come were on all of our minds that evening as we enjoyed a delicious and typical Savoyard dinner of Raclette and Cheese Fondue.

Friday, our last ski day, was colder than it had been but sparkling in the beautiful sunshine!! Our large group gradually broke into some smaller groups during the morning because everyone had a different idea of what to do with this last day of sun and fresh snow. The fearsome foursome of Jim P., Yan W., and Dale and Bianca M. stuck together and had a SUPERB time! We saw Richard M., Pat T., Jan H. and Nancy A. when we took a pit stop up at Belvedere in the midst of crushing those long cruising runs! Opting for a late lunch, we met up with Terri C., Don B., Eileen M., Joe K., John B., Sean O., Joe H., Cheryl R., Marion R., Joe L. and Gene Z. at slope side Le Folie Douce for a ski lunch experience that one can only find in France. Think "Moulin Rouge" meets "Drag Queens and Dancers" to present "Alice in Wonderland", and you kind of have the idea. It was an epic experience to crown an epic day! After downloading to avoid the growing chill and long trek back, we were able to literally ski all the way back through town to Killy Sport and the drop off of our rental skis. I had loved my Head Epic Joys and was reluctant to turn them in. The quality of rental equipment this trip was exceptional.

We had arranged with Nicholas for a Farewell Wine and Hors d'oeuvres Happy Hour on SJSC, and he again pulled out all of the stops for us. The event brought everyone together for our group photo, although setting that up was somewhat akin to herding cats! We swapped stories about our experiences of the week and enjoyed a last delicious dinner before settling bar accounts, packing and bringing down all big bags. Our departure the next morning was set for the VERY early hour of 4:45 AM.

Jean Claude promptly arrived at the appointed hour on Saturday morning, and we settled back for the long ride down the mountain to Geneva. Nicholas had provided coffee for us in the lounge, and Chef T. had packed delicious and abundant bag breakfasts for us to enjoy on the bus. We simply could not have asked more of the Hotel Altitude and Val d'Isere, and a huge shout out must go out to Jeff T. for suggesting such a marvelous destination and hotel! Our host Nicholas and his staff – in particular, Tasmyn, Juliette, Manon and Maeron – worked tirelessly to make our week so great! A huge Merci Beaucoup to them!

Geneva Airport was again a zoo when we arrived!! The same UK groups that had arrived with us were all departing with us. The line to security was 45 minutes long, and we were walking through it the entire time. Never has such a line been seen at an airport!! Despite that, our flight to Copenhagen took off on time, and we were greeted to a gentle snowfall as we touched down in Denmark. Unfortunately, none of the snow sports equipment that had been checked made the trip. It was necessary for Dale M. to hang back and help with missing luggage claims while the rest of us patiently waited on the bus. As everyone knows, these things happen.

We had been met at the airport by Uffe from Great Dane Tours, and as soon as we were checked into the lovely, modern and well-located The Square Hotel, everyone set out with him and his colleague Emilie for a walking tour. Light snow continued to fall and darkness fell as we were led to many of the major sights of Copenhagen. The tour provided an excellent overview of the history and highlights of this wonderful big city destination.

As always happens in our add-on cities, groups that had formed during the ski week continued to enjoy each other's company and made plans for the two full days ahead. A large crowd headed to the Hard Rock Café just across Radhuspladsen to make reservations for the advertised Super Bowl Party scheduled for 10 PM on Sunday. Later many of that same crowd descended upon The Scottish Pub next door to our hotel for an evening of high jinx and hilarity!

Sunday was a beautiful sunny day, and lots of people set out via Hop-On, Hop-Off Bus and Boat for further city exploration. Jeff T. and Eileen G. visited the National Museum of Denmark, Gayle E., Bill M. and Jim T. were in a group that took the train out to Fredericksborg Castle in Hillerud. Dale and Bianca M., Michael J., Lisa M. and Yan W. traveled up to Helsingor to visit Kronborg Castle of "Hamlet" fame. Everyone had a full day of touring, but for many, the day was only half over. After all, it was Super Bowl Sunday, and the Philadelphia Eagles were in the BIG GAME!!

Terri C., Suzanne D., Mark R., Janet D., Sharon B., Jim and Ronni P., Debbie G., Sean O., John B., Don P., Peter L., Thomas A., Fran C., Marion R., Joe L., Richard M., Gene Z. and Matt D. were all seen wearing Black, Green, White and Grey as they headed to Hard Rock Café at 10 PM to play their part by staying up almost all night and cheering the E.A.G.L.E.S to VICTORY!!! Lisa M., Michael J., Nancy A., Jan H. and Dale and Bianca M. among others opted to pick up libations and retire to the comfort of their feather comforter beds while watching the pre-game and then the game unfold on TV 3+HD. The commentary

was all in Danish, but the action was clear to see! We loved the fact that the Danish Play by Play guy was wearing an Eagles green bow tie and vest....and that final score of 41-33!! Wow!!

Monday morning breakfast was sparsely attended, needless to say. Only a handful of SJSC folks were there by 8 AM, and we heard that the place was mobbed just before closing at 10 AM! Despite their fatigue, almost everyone headed out for more touring of Copenhagen. Those 48-hour Hop-On, Hop-Off tickets really made sense on this day. Again, the sun was shining, and the cold was not a problem for this group of hardy snow sports lovers. Dale and Bianca M. took the train out to the lovely small city of Roskilde, while the Round Tower, old hippie haven Christiania, the Stroget for shopping and the Carlsberg Brewery were among the Copenhagen locations others enjoyed. Many in the group ended up the day strolling under the sparkling winter wonderland lights at the Tivoli Amusement Park. Happily, too, during the course of the evening all of the missing snow sports equipment was delivered!

Alas, all wonderful trips must come to an end, and by 8 AM on Tuesday morning, 6 February, all were back on the bus for the trip out to Kastrup Airport and our non-stop flight back to Newark. Once again, those soft snowflakes began to fall as we made our way into Terminal 3 for check-in. Last minute airport shopping in the Duty Free or at the multitude of specialty shops was a must before boarding. As we took off for home, all agreed that the trip had been a wonderful one from start to finish. Injuries and illnesses were minimal, skiing conditions were optimal, Val d'Iserre and Copenhagen were topnotch destinations, and the weather, well who could possibly complain?! And, the Eagles won the Super Bowl!

Thanks to the SJSC Ski Committee and Jamie Chabot at Alphorn Tours for everything you did to put this trip together for us!

Until next trip,

Bianca Mandel – Trip Leader