



GIVE IT UP FOR ST GERVAIS



Briony Key enjoys the therapeutic properties of the thermal spas and family-friendly skiing on her recent visit to the historic town of St Gervais...

Tourists have been coming to **St Gervais** for over 200 years, so I decided to see what all the fuss was about.

Drawn by the thermal spa, and then skiing, this Haute Savoie town has long boosted visitor numbers to the south-east of France

Shoulders below the bubbles of the welcoming outdoor spa, I looked up at the ink black sky, watched the stars twinkle and eased away the ski aches of the day. It was so peaceful.

Within 24 hours of being there I could see those contributing to this 200-year-old history had a point. If there is an art to Alpine living, **St Gervais** has it!

LES THERMES

In 1806 notary Joseph-Marie Gontard founded what is claimed to be the first Alpine spa town, which brought palaces, parks and casinos to the Auvergne Rhône Alpes.

The spa was a hit as its natural waters helped heal the ski and soon wealthy tourists were stopping at its prestigious hotel on route to Chamonix, along with hikers talking the ascent of Mont Blanc.

'Les Thermes' sits in the 'Parc Thermal' in the lower village of Le Fayet and is still a hit today, helping thousands of patients annually.

Its health and beauty treatments are all based on the therapeutic properties of spring water – and it's a great place to visit after a day on the slopes, or for a day of wellbeing.

ST GERVAIS

Travelling up from Le Fayet to the main town is also a treat as St Gervais les Bains (also referred to as St Gervais or St Gervais Mont Blanc) is not a recently purpose built resort and has many historic buildings.

You could say it's a charmer, with its belle époque centre, welcoming chalets and quirky contemporary art exhibition in its car park. A significant year-round population also gives the place a settled feel, with a range of locally run restaurants and cafes, and a lively street market.

Seeing large groups of seasonaires isn't so likely here – and you are likely to be addressed in French, although English is widely spoken and there is a warm welcome.

SKI

Set in a narrow gorge, St Gervais 260km ski area is pretty, and mostly tree lined. Folk on the hill are friendly, and the heart of the resort is a find for beginner and intermediate skiers and snowboarders, with wide runs and plenty of space to build-up confidence and has fun.

Head over to Mont Joly (2,353m) and it's a different scene, with steeper, more challenging routes on and off piste and runs that really make your legs work!



MadDogSki.com's Briony Key

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