

Samoëns

Characterful but inconvenient base for the extensive and varied Grand Massif, shared with Flaine, Morillon and Les Carroz

TOP 10 RATINGS

Extent	****
Fast lifts	**
Queues	****
Snow	***
Expert	****
Intermediate	*****
Beginner	**
Charm	****
Convenience	*
Scenery	****

RPI 90

lift pass	£190
ski hire	£105
lessons	£70
food & drink	£150
total	£515

PISTE MAP

Samoëns is covered on the Flaine map

OT SAMOËNS

When we've visited, the market has been out on the fringe of the village. The church is shown in the right spot, though ↓

- + Lovely historic village, with traffic-free centre and weekly market
- + Lifts into big, varied area shared with Flaine and Les Carroz
- + Glorious views from top heights
- + Very close to Geneva airport
- Main access lift is way outside the village, and has no return piste
- Not the best base for beginners
- Limited choice of central bars and restaurants

The impressive Grand Massif area is chiefly associated in Britain with high, purpose-built, apartment-dominated Flaine; but the network (described mainly in the Flaine chapter) can also be accessed from lower, traditional villages. And the cutest of these, if not the most convenient for skiing, is Samoëns.

THE RESORT

Samoëns is an attractive 'Monument Historique' – once a thriving centre for stonemasons, with their work much in evidence.

Village charm The resort has a small traffic-free centre of narrow streets lined by appealing food shops, and a pretty square (sadly not traffic-free) with a stone fountain, an ancient linden tree, a fine church and other medieval buildings. Also nearby is a nominally car-free area of modern development. The place as a whole retains the feel of 'real' rural France and makes a compelling base for families. There is a weekly market for your cheese supplies.

Convenience Slope access is by one of two gondolas, both a drive or 'reliable and frequent' bus ride from the village: an old one across the valley and a newer one nearer to the village. Back to the old gondola, there are only red and black runs that can be tricky or closed – and there are no

runs to the new one. So it's a gondola then a bus at the end of the day. Not a problem, but not convenient.

Scenery The village has a pretty valley setting, with attractively woody ridges and glorious views from the tops.

THE MOUNTAINS

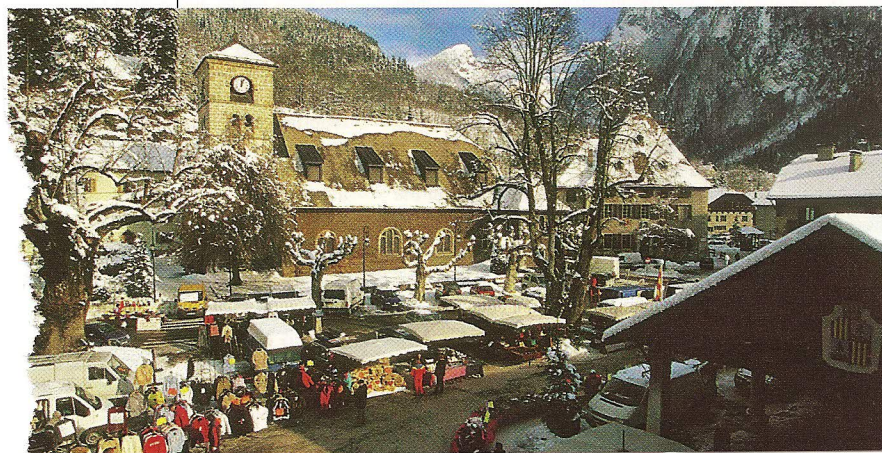
Most of the skiing directly above Samoëns is on open slopes beneath the peak of Tête des Saix.

Slopes The two gondolas from the valley arrive at separate points on the 'hilly plateau' of Samoëns 1600. This mini-resort is also reachable by road. A six-pack installed two seasons ago now whisks you up to Tête des Saix, from which point you can proceed towards Flaine via a narrow, crowded piste followed by a fast chair in the Vernant bowl. Or you can turn right to descend to Morillon or Les Carroz.

Fast lifts Mountain access is now respectably quick, but the area as a whole has many slow lifts still.

Queues We have had reports of annoying waits for the main gondola

345



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KEY FACTS

Resort 720-1600m
2,360-5,250ft

Grand Massif ski area
(Samoëns and all linked resorts)

Slopes 700-2480m
2,300-8,140ft

Lifts 70

Pistes 265km

165 miles

Green 12%

Blue 45%

Red 32%

Black 11%

Snowmaking

218 guns

Massif ski area

(excluding Flaine)

Slopes 700-2120m

2,300-6,700ft

Lifts 43

Pistes 125km

78 miles

UK PACKAGES

Alps Accommodation, American Ski, BoardnLodge, Chalet Bezière, Chalet Group, Chez Michelle, Erna Low, Independent Ski Links, Lagrange, Peak Retreats, Powder White, PowderBeds, Ski Expectations, Ski France, Ski Independence, Zenith

Phone numbers

From abroad use the prefix +33 and omit the initial '0' of the phone number

TOURIST OFFICE

www.samoens.com



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www.alpsaccommodation.com

at peak periods, but not recently. Queues at 1600 for access to Tête des Saix are 'transformed' by the new six-pack; but the narrow piste towards Vernant is more crowded than ever.

Terrain parks The main park is in Flaine.

Snow reliability The slopes above Samoëns face due north, so above 1600 snow is fairly reliable. There is snowmaking around 1600, but one January visitor this year was appalled by the state of the blue run from Tête des Saix, which lacked snowmaking and as a result was 'icy, with lots of stones'.

Experts The upper pistes on Tête des Saix are among the most testing in the Grand Massif, and there is lots of good off-piste in the region.

Intermediates Samoëns normally makes a satisfactory base for all but the most timid intermediates, who might be better off in Morillon. But note the comments above on snow conditions on Tête des Saix. From there you have a choice of good long runs in various directions. In good snow the valley runs to Vercland are highly enjoyable – the black is little steeper than the red, and used less.

Beginners Beginners buy a special pass and go up to 1600, where they will find gentle, snow-sure slopes – excellent when not crowded – but no long green runs to progress to. Morillon is a better bet. And the nursery slopes at Sixt are quiet.

Snowboarding Beware draglifts on the nursery slopes.

Cross-country There are trails on the flat valley floor around Samoëns, and more challenging ones up the valley beyond Sixt and up at Col de Joux Plane (1700m).

Mountain restaurants Several options at Samoëns 1600. We enjoyed excellent service and pork provençale at the newish Lou Caboëns, a small,

woody table-service place. Mimy's is tipped for its 'massive burger in a lovely crusty roll'. The Pré d'Oscar is a handy spot for a drink at the end of the day.

Schools and guides We've had good reports of the ZigZag school ('great attitude, patience, encouragement').

Families The Loupiots nursery takes kids from three months to six years old, and ski lessons are available. The ZigZag school offers multi-activity courses.

STAYING THERE

Alps Accommodation is a British-run Samoëns specialist with over 35 chalets and apartments available.

Chalets Samoëns doesn't seem to figure in the programmes of major chalet operators, but we continue to get glowing reports of owner-run chalet Bezière ('outstanding', 'enormous bedrooms, food absolutely excellent').

Hotels There are five 2-star and 3-star places. We and readers have enjoyed the 3-star Neige et Roc (0450 344072), a walk from the centre – 'friendly staff, big spa area' and 'haute cuisine'. Avoid the annexe, though.

Apartments Self-catering is mostly in small-scale developments, and quite a lot of it in individual chalets. The Fermes de Samoëns is a smart Lagrange Prestige residence (with pool). Similarly attractive options available through Peak Retreats are the CGH residence Reine des Prés and the Ferme de Fontany.

Eating out The Table de Ffine is a short drive from the centre, but a fine spot for a proper dinner – beautiful wooden interior and 'good quality, imaginative menu'. The formerly 'excellent' Muscade et Basilic has changed hands and is now La Mezzanine. A 2011 reporter rates the Bois de Lune 'excellent'. The Louisiane has 'great' pizzas.

Après-ski Nightlife is quiet and reporters complain there is little choice of bars; Irish pub Covey's ('doubled in size and still the liveliest') and Savoir are the reader favourites.

Off the slopes Samoëns offers quite a range of activities. Snowmobiling up Samoëns 1600 is wilder than is usual in the Alps. There's dog sledding and reader recommends the snowshoeing. There is an outdoor, covered ice rink hosting regular hockey matches, and sports and cultural centre.