

NORWAY'S A SNOW BRAINER

There's little snow in the Alps, so head for Scandinavia where conditions are perfect

SNOW may be in short supply in the Alps, but it's a different story in Norway, where there's already masses of the stuff and the season is expected to last until May.

But powdery pistes are not the only draw here. You'll also find slopes that are gloriously empty compared with resorts in France — and there's a relaxed Scandinavian vibe that makes apres-ski a lazy pleasure.

Hemsedal sits in one of Norway's prettiest valleys, 125 miles north-west of Oslo. The country's second largest ski resort, it is a winter haven where runs sweep along high ridges and plunge through pine trees.

With my wife Catherine and children Michael, 11, and Alice, eight, I stayed in one of the Radvyr-

by Jeremy Daniels

lia cabins, a cluster of cosy wooden hideaways pitched on the edge of one of these splendid slopes — which meant just a short glide to the lifts each morning.

Hemsedal is framed by Totten — a 4,911ft (1,497m) beast of a mountain, which offers the highest piste in Norway. It is windy and cold at the summit — but, oh my, what a view! Snow-capped peaks jut into the sky, stretching away north towards the Arctic Circle.

Clever planning means you can ski from here on blue runs right to the bottom. The very top is a challenge for younger children, but the rest is a blast — wide



Happy days: Hemsedal with its high snowfall is ideal for children

cruising motorways with bags of space to practise turns or simply tuck in and skim along.

This is a great place to come if the whole family wants to improve their skiing. Our children had never skied before and, like a lot of couples with young ones, my wife and I had scarcely seen a mountain for years.

For the children, there is the Vallieland nursery area at the base station, where my pair gathered for lessons before heading up the drag lift with a wave and a wobble (though Alice was just as interested in the electric roundabout that chugged them around on the snow in giant inner tubes).

Their instructor, Nikolas, it turned out, is one of Denmark's best snowboarders — but he was dedication itself, taking great pains to encourage the children to improve their skiing.

The ethos is to nurture each child and seek small improvements in technique and confidence as the day goes on.

Nikolas also found time to stop halfway through the morning for a hot chocolate and what rapidly became Alice's favourite treat — a £2 macaroon with coconut sprinkles, cutely called a kokostoppe. So it was that by

the end of the week, Michael was skiing confidently and Alice had developed enough to be turning nicely down a short red run.

As for the adults — well, we skied all over the mountain, guided by Sophie, a glamorous Swede who, thanks to a stint Down Under, sounded more like an Australian.

Her wise nudges to lean out on turns and push our weight forward all the time meant that we were cutting down the slopes far more gracefully after a few days.

The food here is pricey, but, compared with the Alps, ski-pass prices are reasonable — £149 a week for adults, £121 for children.

Skiing aside, we had a breathtaking day further down the valley, whizzing across frozen lakes and through thick forests,

driving a team of six huskies — all of them big, powerful and vocal.

This experience did not come cheap — 1,000 kroner (just under £80) for anyone aged ten and up. But it was unforgettable fun. I can still feel the wind on my cheeks.

Even when I was lying back on a deckchair in the sunshine at Skigaarden later in the week — having eaten a warming

moose stew — I was dreaming of yelping huskies and high-speed chases across frozen lakes. Excitement abounds on Norway's slopes.

TRAVEL FACTS

SKI Norway (020 7199 6010;

ski-norway.co.uk) offers holidays to Hemsedal. Seven-

night self-catering stays at the Radvyrli cabins — with flights from London, Manchester, Edinburgh or Aberdeen, and including resort transfers — cost from £725 pp. For more information, go to visitnorway.com

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Norwegians — dab hands at winter sports — have been using skis for more than 4,000 years. At least that's what an ancient rock carving in Nordland county suggests.

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EASY EXPLORING

NEW visa rules have made it more straightforward for British passport holders to travel to India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Georgia, Kenya and Kazakhstan. Independent agency World Expeditions is taking advantage with trips that are visa-free or on e-visa schemes. Book the Vietnam Family Explorer package (12 days, suitable for children as young as eight) from April to January for £1,290 per adult and £770 per child. worldexpeditions.co.uk

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Travel Notes...

What's new and how to get the best from your holiday

MIND GAMES

MASTER of illusion Derren Brown has revealed his latest project: the world's first 'psychological theme park' experience at Thorpe Park, Surrey. Launching in spring, the immersive — and secretive — attraction spans 2,306 square metres and is designed to manipulate the mind over 13 minutes. mindswanted.co.uk

TAKE TO THE SKIES

YOU can hail a private jet with your smartphone — the 'Uber of the skies' app JetSmarter has launched in Britain. It provides instant pricing and availability for planes across the globe, from custom charter flights to deals on specific routes. That's certainly one way to do the daily commute. jetsmarter.com

WILD SIDE

A NOMAD Tanzania safari camp perched 7,500ft above ground is the first to overlook the Ngorongoro Crater Rim and the Serengeti. Book into the eight-room Entamanu camp from June 2016 to experience the unique view — and glimpse one of the highest concentrations of wildlife in Africa. From £427 pp per night. nomad-tanzania.com

YOGA ON THE SLOPES

THE Ski Week and Hotpod Yoga have teamed up so you can bend and stretch in inflatable pods on the slopes of Obertauern, Austria, as part of the Ski Week programme (from £656 pp) in March. Includes accommodation, ski pass, events wristband and ski or board instructors. theskiweek.com

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