



NEED TO KNOW

Rates at **Conrad Maldives** start from \$950 per night in a beach villa exclusive of all taxes and \$1,350 per night in a water villa. Rates are per room per night and include breakfast.

Return flights with **British Airways** from £900.

To learn more about **Conrad Maldives Rangali Island**, visit conradmaldives.com or call +960 668 0629

For more info about **Conrad Hotels & Resorts**, visit news.conradhotels.com

tually *do* something while you're there, watersports are a favourite, and there are glass-bottomed boat tours looping around the islands most days.

But the best thing you can possibly do is grab a snorkel, dip your head in the blue water, and not come up until you stop seeing new and fantastic-coloured species of fish. I was down there for two hours and was slashed red with sunburn before I left the reefs, and even then I was still seeing tiny darting yellow creatures I'm convinced nobody has ever seen before.

On the last night of my stay, I walked to the far tip of the northern island and watched the sun set with a load of birds, before one of the hotel staff found me, figured I was lonely and gave me a tour of the most luxurious villa the resort has to offer.

In the wardrobes there they have special biodegradable golf balls and a club with which you can hit them guiltlessly into the sea, which I did, and I have never felt so alive. Whatever the cost, whatever the occasion, it's never a bad time to go to the Maldives and hit your golfball-shaped worries into the setting sun.

Twenty-to-thirty seconds into your stay and you've forgotten what the concept of stress even is

“



Why you should think outside the box for this season's ski trip



THE THREE Valleys offer some of the finest skiing in the world, providing skiers and borders off all abilities with the largest linked ski region in the Alps, served by some of the most sought-after and exclusive accommodation. Instinct (or maybe habit) draws people towards the A-list resorts of Meribel and Courcheval, but with a little imagination it's possible to retain full access to these famous destinations whilst basing yourself in a more discreet, lesser-known part of the range.

That, at least, is the pitch from boutique chalet company The Alpine Club, which has three stunning hideaways in the charming (and often overlooked) resort of St Martin de Belleville. St Martin is an excellent base from which to explore the whole of the Tree Valleys skiing area. The Belleville valley, while being fully connected with the surrounding area, is also perfect for discovering some of the best off-piste opportunities around.

St Martin itself has all the charm of a traditional Savoyard village (where you're as likely to come across chickens in the road as you are your fellow skiers) yet it whizzes guests up to the ridge overlooking Meribel in a brand new, super-fast chair lift.

There is a perception that St Martin is low and out on a limb alongside its more famous neighbours, but in reality it's at the same altitude as Meribel (1450m) and is just a few lifts and a couple of pistes away from the high terrain of Val Thorens. Furthermore, for a small village St Martin packs a punch when it comes to high-end accommodation and world-class restaurants. Indeed, the area has been shortlisted for 'Gastronomic Resort of the Year' in the 2016 World Snow Awards.

If this all sounds too good to be true then you book

one of the traditional timber chalets and experience it for yourself. The super-stylish chalet pictured above, The Ecurie, is an ideal location from which to explore the charms and delights of St Martin and the wider Three Valley area. Helen Raemers, who runs The Alpine Club, restored this former barn which serves as the latest edition to a portfolio of luxurious mountain retreats. The views are stunning, the chefs are talented (serving up a stunning six-course taster menu six nights a week) and the cosy interior comes with a touch of grandeur thanks to the double-height space spread out over the top floor beneath an original stable roof.

The Ecurie caters to the kind of snow-enthusiast who likes to combine a hard day on the mountain with luxurious accommodation and cocktails before dinner. It sleeps eight guests in four beautifully designed rooms each with a doors onto a balcony or terrace. The chalet's chauffeur is always on hand for the five-minute run to the main lift station at St Martin and the staff's local knowledge and enthusiasm will ensure that a Michelin-starred meal or a professional massage is just a phone call away. Airport pick-ups, hearty breakfasts, afternoon tea and a well-stocked bar all come as standard.

So this year, rather than reaching for that repeat booking in Meribel, you could discover the luxury and seclusion of the village round the corner. It may not offer the designer shops and high-end nightlife of Courcheval, but if that's not what you go skiing for then you'll find St Martin a quiet, secret gem.

See www.thealpineclub.co.uk for more information on the chalets and the village of St Martin.