

A new visitor's guide to Chamonix ski stations

Never skied in Cham? Read on!

First, get acquainted with the layout and scale of the valley and the names of each station.



See also <https://www.chamonix.com/skis-areas,22,en.html>

Savoy and **Planard** are low lying, small beginner stations within walking distance of the town centre. Ski passes for here are cheapest – you don't need the more expensive Le Pass. The **Aiguille du Midi** station from town only gives access to the glaciated off piste and uncontrolled Vallee Blanche. You need the most expensive Mont Blanc pass for this (which covers all stations including Les Houches).

Taking ski lessons?

If you have booked ski lessons, the ski school will dictate where your lesson will be held based on your level.

Advice for more experienced skiers

The majority of course delegates are usually recreational skiers/boarders who are comfortable on intermediate terrain (and harder) and the rest of this guide is for you.

Access – buses and trains

Ski buses go to all the stations. The train also stops at Le Praz (200m from the Flegere station), Argentiere (walking distance to Grands Montets) and at Vallorcine (100m from the cable car that goes up the backside of Balme/Vallorcine domain. Download a timetable at this page <https://www.chamonix.net/english/transport/train> Trains are not free. The ski bus is.

Brevent is the closest lift station to Chamonix, at the top of a steep road that is often icy and unpleasant to walk up (and down) in ski boots. Great views of Mont Blanc. Sunny aspect. Links with Flegere via a horizontal liaison cable car (occasionally doesn't run in really bad weather and high winds). Mostly red runs. Best to ski here if time is short to maximise your ski time.

Flegere is a few miles further up the valley. It has a new, very fast telecabine from the car park. Mostly red runs but also has one long green run suitable for beginners not ready for blue runs. Possible to start at Brevent, ski over to Flegere and go down at Flegere and take a bus (or train) back to Chamonix, or vice versa. Rarely do snow conditions allow for skiing the "home runs" at Brevent and Flegere down to the car parks. Take the lifts.

Grands Montets

GM is the biggest, highest and steepest domain with mostly red and some black runs. Suitable for strong intermediate skiers. North facing so colder. A long (800m) moderate red run takes you down to the car park between the trees. Nice. Most extensive "side piste" and off piste terrain in the valley (if you are experienced and suitably equipped with avalanche kit). Less suitable for nervous low red run skiers and NOT suitable for blue run skiers and below. In summary, not the place to ski on the first day or with a group of widely varying ability.

Balme/Vallorcine

This is furthest away from Chamonix and offers mainly gentle red and blue run skiing and fabulous scenery. Best avoided in windy and cold weather though. Suitable for mixed ability groups to ski together or easily split up on red and blue trails and be able to meet up easily. On the Balme side, there are long drag lifts and green runs at the car park level for beginners. Less suitable than anywhere else for boarders because there are a few long, flat tracks. There's always snow so you can ski down to the main car park (but not always on the Vallorcine side). Allow enough travel time to get there and back.

Les Houches

Going DOWN the valley (back towards Geneva) is Les Houches. Lots of moderate red run trails between the trees (and one black world cup trail) so this is the place to go when the weather is bad (and normally remains open even if the higher lifts at the other domains are not running). Best to get off the bus and start at the furthest main lift – Prarion (rather than the older, slower Bellevue lift). Snow down to the car park almost certainly guaranteed. NOTE: this domain is NOT included in the Chamonix Le Pass.

Lift status (open/closed), trails (blue, red etc) by domain

See online for the distribution of trails according to difficulty (colour coded). Note that Grands Montets RED runs are typically steeper than red runs at the other stations.

<https://www.chamonix.com/lifts,88,en.html>

Salle hors Sac

This is "picnic room" in French! All the stations have them (though Brevent's is hard to find). Find them on the piste map and then signage. Top tip: if skiing in a big group, take a tactical early lunch break (noon) to potentially avoid the ski schools and UCPA guided groups) so you get a table.

Bon ski!

Wilderness Medical Training