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# A CHALET IN CHATEL

Over a decade of life in the Alps for **Helen Thrupp** and her family has proved a breath of fresh air – now she looks back on how they created their home and business in the traditional ski village of Chatel

We moved to Chatel in 2004 after a four-year search for a chalet that started in the Chamonix valley and finished when we drove up the valley to Chatel and experienced that jolt of recognition that you get when you find the place you've been looking for all along. Not only did it have the business potential we were seeking, but it also offered a beautiful environment and welcoming community.

Our story is not typical of many expats in the Alps; we didn't do a ski season and stay, we hadn't skied in the Portes du Soleil before, in fact I don't ski at all (a fact prompting amazed exclamations by many guests).

Paul and I had been looking for a project which would allow us to work together for quite a while. Then he went on a long weekend skiing, stayed in a catered chalet and came home to say he'd found the perfect thing for us,

combining our love of the outdoors, our passion for meeting people and wanting to run a business with a focus on excellent service – selling everything we had in the UK and moving to the Alps to run a ski chalet!

After that apparently impulsive decision, our approach became more pragmatic and businesslike. We drew up a very strict list of criteria for our potential home and business and started looking for the following:

- ✓ Walkable to the centre, which had to have shops and restaurants
- ✓ A few minutes to the ski slopes
- ✓ Separate accommodation for us and our then two-year-old
- ✓ Five en-suite bedrooms in the main chalet
- ✓ Parking
- ✓ Views
- ✓ Garden
- ✓ Ready to run, no need for major works.

At that time the internet was in its infancy, but we were able to look online at property and gather some information. The search period

was frustrating at times; in the space between seeing something online and us being able to make a trip, property would be sold or withdrawn. We learned that if we were keen, one of us making a trip to establish an interest was an important step.

Many chalets would have done, if we'd been willing to either spend a lot on the purchase or on renovation. We wanted a place with a sense of community and traditional Alpine way of life. As we looked we soon realised that unsuitable chalets fell into three categories: perfect location but too expensive; perfect location and right price, but needing loads of work; or right price, no work required, but too far away from the nearest town.

We were learning all the time and refining what was most important to us. In the end, although close a couple of times, we were really glad we waited for the one that ticked all the boxes – in Chatel in the heart of the Portes du Soleil. ▶



## Seasonal flavour

Chatel is a small town (not quite a village) in the Portes du Soleil, 90 minutes from Geneva and right on the border of Switzerland, so only half an hour from Évian-les-Bains and Montreux in either direction. Great for walks along Lake Geneva, evenings at the jazz festival or just lazing by the lake. On our doorstep, the Portes du Soleil is a huge ski area in winter and in summer hosts some amazing mountain biking, road cycling and walking. The chalet and Chatel are perfectly situated to make the most of all the area has to offer.

Out of season around 1,500 people live in Chatel which retains a traditional village feel. There are fêtes and foires in autumn and spring, social clubs and children's clubs and of course the lovely walks around the area. There's a primary school, two doctors, a dentist, bakery, two butchers and a supermarket with a petrol station, plus a swimming pool and spa.

In winter, the huge investment in the resort and skiing infrastructure, with new lifts regularly installed, provides everything required for the thousands of visitors who choose Chatel as the destination for their winter holiday. In summer, the town is busy with visitors who come for great family activity holidays and the various festivals that take place in July and August.

## First impressions last

I'll always remember the first step into the house, that woody fragrance that still gets me after a couple of weeks away when the house has been shut up. At that time there was only one entrance into the hall and beyond that into the lounge/dining area that runs along the back of the chalet, with doors out onto the covered terrace. The lounge has a lovely open fireplace; so cosy in the winter. There is a bedroom with en-suite bathroom on the ground floor, with four further bedrooms on the first floor, two that share a bathroom and two with en-suite bathrooms. Two of them have balconies with views from the back of the chalet over trees and the valley.

The chalet sits on a plot covering around 1,000m<sup>2</sup> and is incredibly private as it is surrounded by beautiful trees; the birdsong is amazing all year round. Its great location means we have all this beauty and tranquillity around us and yet can walk to the centre of Chatel in five minutes.

When we first moved in there was one kitchen in the chalet, down in our apartment; I cooked there and we ran the food up to the large oak table where our guests were seated upstairs. After a while we wanted more of a separation between public and private life so we converted the huge garage on the ground floor into a kitchen and a second entrance/bootroom. This gave us a large kitchen upstairs, which was much more convenient for catering for and looking after our guests, and also means the two parts of the chalet can work independently.

We then built a new garage at the end of the drive which makes an excellent secure space



for skis and bikes, with racks for both in place, plus extra storage in the roof. We always used local tradesmen for all the work we had done on the chalet. It's a great way to get to know people and build relationships, not to mention improve your French!

Down a linking staircase, that can be locked if required, is our home – an apartment with a kitchen and a lovely living area, three bedrooms and two bathrooms. Between May and July 2015, the apartment was completely stripped out and refurbished, with the addition of a separate entrance, giving us a lighter, brighter home, with our own front door! There

is a second terrace on this level with a hot tub, which is very popular with the guests.

We have loved our 12 years here. Our son has done all his schooling locally, both he and Paul have played football for local teams and we have had a successful business in both the winter and the summer. We now count many of the guests who have come back year on year as friends. However, we have decided it's time to sell and look forward to new opportunities and projects. ■

*The chalet is on the market for €1,375,000  
alpine-property.com and immobilier-chatel.com*