

The Howard Family, Ski 2 Freedom Foundation and La Rosière help make a dream holiday come true for Matthew aged 8 ...

Ski 2 Freedom Foundation is an independent non-profit organisation created in 2007 to encourage and promote snow-sport activities for disability and special needs.

ESF La Rosière, high up in the Tarantaise, is one of many ski schools in France making a difference to the lives of so many children and adults who have a disability or special need.



How did this dream holiday come about?

Arabella McNeil contacted Ski 2 Freedom Foundation to discuss her son's

requirements. Matthew Howard (8), has cerebral palsy affecting his left side, he had tried skiing a few years before but kept falling over and didn't enjoy it. His parents decided this time it was vital to find someone experienced in teaching children with disabilities. She told Catherine Cosby, Founder and Director of Ski 2 Freedom, that *"having discovered your website and seeing a young boy called Hugo with his instructor who appeared to have similar problems as my son it made me realise that there are loads of options and adaptations available to people with disabilities and that judging from other people's experience there was a very good chance that Matthew would be able to ski."*

A driving passion and a belief that there should be no frontiers when it comes to children and adults enjoying the snow and mountains has found Catherine and her trusty Peugeot driving thousands of kilometres from one resort to another absorbing as much information as possible and meeting some remarkable people. It is this information about ski schools, tourist offices and other organisations which is used to meet the specific needs and requirements of people, whatever their disability or special need to find an independent choice of ski resort so they can rejuvenate, rehabilitate or simply experience the sheer magic of the mountains with family and friends.

Having discussed all needs of both Matthew and the rest of the family Catherine was able to identify which ski resorts might be best suited for the Howard family. This information was then used by the family so they could make their own choice of resort – what made it easier for them was that the Foundation had already made contact with the ski schools which meant that Matthew's requirements had already been thought about and therefore when Mrs Howard spoke with the ski schools they could discuss the options available.

"I found it very reassuring to be able to talk direct with Simon Atkinson, the head of ESF in La Rosière, and talk over Matthew's issues. He recommended that Matthew have one to one lessons and that if it didn't work out for him he could swap these for chair skiing sessions. Having this flexible approach was perfect. We were then able to reassure Matthew that whatever happened he would have a great experience!"

Arabella McNeil told Ski 2 Freedom that they had decided on La Rosière

"Matthew's teacher - conveniently also called Mathieu! - was brilliant. He understood immediately that Matthew tires very easily and made sure that he had regular breaks. Matthew made great progress and by the end of the week was able to snowplough, stop, and turn on gentle slopes. More importantly, Matthew felt really proud of his achievement and had a great time!"

It is not just the information as to what sport activities are on offer but also knowledge on other components that are so important to someone's holiday being successful or miserable. In Matthew's case the question of boots and fitting was also extremely important. Once again the importance of having first hand knowledge of a resort proved helpful to Matthew's problems with his boots and feet.

"Catherine was able to get in touch with the owner of Twinner at La Rosière, who re-assured her that they would be able to sort something out. As it turned out, Philippe the owner made some raised insoles for Matthew and this made all the difference."

La Rosière can accommodate all types of disability or special need. The tourist office (www.larosiere.com) is an extremely useful main contact. The resort has a good selection of adapted accommodation, from hotel, catered and self-catered apartments (all of which have an indoor swimming pool) and there are some great chalet companies offering good accommodation for those not totally dependent on a wheelchair. The Les Eucherts side of the village is probably best suited to young families and wheelchair visitors. However there is good adapted accommodation in the old village but does necessitate a slope back up to the commercial centre although it is a ski in and ski out residence

"I would really recommend La Rosière as a lovely family orientated station, with a very positive, experienced and flexible approach to disabled skiing. I'd also like to thank Catherine and Ski 2 Freedom for taking so much care and time to help us make the right choices. We had a really amazing time and will definitely go back to La Rosière." Arabella McNeil

But perhaps the last word should go to Matthew...

"Before going skiing I was quite scared about it. My teacher Mathieu, from ESF La Rosière, helped make me feel more confident and was very cheerful. He taught me how to snowplough and to turn, I say "just give it a go!"

Just some of the other ways of skiing around La Rosière.



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