

Bourg St Maurice/Les Arcs

Les Arcs has remained one of France's best kept secrets.

BOURG ST MAURICE/LES ARCS

3 The trails

- CC Cross country** Excellent/beginner to advanced
- DNH Downhill** Excellent/beginner to advanced
- FR Freeride** Poor/intermediate
- U Uplift** Funicular from Bourg to Arc 1600 and numerous chairs and gondolas accessing the trails on the mountain and linking the 3 mountain resorts
- Pros** Great trails; quiet and in great condition
- Cons** Poor for freeride

Les Arcs has a lot to offer the mountain biker; there are more than enough trails to keep you interested for a whole summer, never mind a week's holiday. One thing in particular that makes Les Arcs stand out is the amount of vertical drop available; from the highest lift to the valley floor gives you nearly 2 vertical km to play with. This allows for descents lasting up to an hour and also explains why a lot

OPENING TIMES

The funicular itself runs every half hour from 0730 until 1930; the lifts generally open from the start of Jul until the end of Aug

RESORT PRICES

1 day: €21; 1 week: €65

DIRECTORY

Tourist Office: T+33 479-070492
Hospital: T+33 479-417979
Taxi/Airport Transfers:
T+33 632-192962; coolbus.co.uk



Clockwise from top:
1. Amazing sunset straight on. 2. Rock stack photo op. 3. Let it roll, let it roll.
4. Singletrack traverse. 5. Another pleasant valley Sunday.

of people have been using the area as a warm up for the Mega Avalanche. Above the treeline everything is very open and rocky with a good mixture of fast and slower technical trails. Below the treeline the trails tend to be a bit more loamy with some steeper sections to contend with. Whilst there is a variety of trail difficulties available it is certainly towards the harder end of the spectrum where Les Arcs excels. The forests below 1800 m, running from below Arc 2000 all the way round to Peisey, is littered with trails that criss-cross each other allowing for many variations.

The Lowdown

Locals do... Time it so they get the last funicular ride up and take the bus up to arc 1800 giving one big final descent and meaning you can ride until 2000.

Locals don't... Wake up early, the trails are deserted before noon.

Don't miss... La Varda trail. This requires a bit of a pushing or uphill to reach but is well worth it as it is a dictionary definition of the word epic; be prepared for one of the longest sections of technical riding that you are ever likely to ride.

Remember to avoid... Riding without spare tubes, the ground is rocky here.



Cross country

There are plenty of great technical cross country rides throughout the valley and up around the Les Arcs resorts. Some are mapped many aren't, which adds value to having a guide. For an out and out XC break try the *Bike Village* (bikevillage.co.uk) in nearby Landry who have great trail knowledge.

Downhill

There are so many good downhill trails, and mostly natural routes, so a guide is best to make the most of your time here;

try Rob at the *Coolbus* or *Velo-City* (rob@thecoolbus.co.uk). With two purpose-built downhill and countless trails through the forests, many finish further up or down the valley and may require a pedal to get back to the funicular but are more than worth it.

Easy The two downhill courses found at Arc 1800 and 2000 are both pretty easy to ride and good fun to get to grips

with the area before trying the steeper and more technical natural trails.

Difficult Take the great black eight trail, which runs approximately from the top of the funicular to the bottom. The uplift takes 10 minutes and departs every half hour. This gives you 20 minutes to get down the 800 m of vertical descent in time for the next lift which is feasible but not easy!

Practicalities

As with a lot of French resorts, Les Arcs is split up into several different villages. Bourg St Maurice sits lower in the valley at an altitude of 850 m. Arc 1600 is directly above Bourg, then, as you traverse the mountain south from here you come to Arc 1800 followed by Peisey/Vallandry. Arc 1950 and 2000 are situated in the next valley to the east. During the summer months Bourg is the busiest town. There is always something going on and the high street and surrounding bars are generally pretty busy.

Sleeping The cheapest place to stay in town geared up to cater for mountain bikers is *Velo-City* (velo-city.net). Their apartment in the Bourg high street is right in the thick of it, yet still only a 2-min pedal from the ski lift. Prices here start from €18 a night for this cheap and cheerful accommodation and you can arrange for them to show you around the trails as well. *Hot Marmot* (hotmarmot.com) offer a step up from this with prices of €45 a night B&B or €55 half board. Their huge chalet sleeps 16-20 people and has a large workshop, two large lounges and a garden complete with barbecue, mini-ramp and trampoline! Two companies offering bike packages are *Trail Addiction* and *Bike village* who both offer guiding.

Eating There are many good restaurants in Bourg and Arc 1800 covering the full spectrum of dining experiences. In Bourg the best fast food experience to be had is the local kebab shop on the main road through town just after the Tonneau roundabout. The Turkish owner's *Bo Selecta!* impersonations add an extra element of entertainment! Opposite here you will find the *Petit St Bernard* which has an excellent €16 set menu, and just a bit further back, the *Montagnole* which probably serve up the best food in town. For food on the go, the goats cheese and honey paninis in Arc 1800 are pretty special.

Bars and clubs For boozy nights, again the two best options are Bourg or Arc 1800. In Bourg the *Bar Central* (aka *Spot Bar*) is a long standing favourite with the local seasonaires and the owner Christian is not shy about pouring some eye-watering home brew spirits down your neck. *Bazoom*, just opposite the train station is another good hangout and frequently has bands and DJs on. The *Tonneau* is also a favourite largely due to its extensive outdoor seating which is ideal for an afternoon beer in the sun. After midnight head to the unfortunately named *L'Impasse* for an unparalleled nightclub experience. Arc 1800's *Chez Boubou* is a very friendly

Freeride

If there is an area that is slightly lacking in Les Arcs it would be the small amount of man-made stuff available. There is plenty of scope for development of this but at the time of writing Les Arcs show very little interest in putting any effort into it. Fortunately, the resort more than makes up for this with its extensive quality singletrack.

place with an extensive list of shots on offer. The bowling alley is another good option but for later on head to the *Apocalypse* nightclub. Just make sure you visit the cash machine before you go in.

Bike shop In Bourg the only option for bike spares is *Intersport*. Luckily they do carry a surprising amount of stock and you can usually pick up what you need there. For a more specialist shop go up to Arc 1600. The shop in the courtyard has a lot of downhill specific parts and bikes. They also hire out Commencal bikes and have a good range available, complete with body armour and full-face helmets.

Internet café There are few internet cafés dotted about but the easiest one to find is probably the one next door to the *Indochine* restaurant on the main road through Bourg. *McDonalds* also has free Wi-Fi if you have a laptop with you.

Bike map available? Lift tickets and bike maps are available from the funicular station in Bourg. Be aware that the bike map only shows a fraction of the trails in the area so it could be worth picking up a small scale map from one of the bookshops in town.