

## Les Trois Vallées, France, by Leslie Caldwell

Spectacular mountains, incredible skiing, wonderful food, international atmosphere, high-energy group... it must be the SCSC trip to **Les Trois Vallées, France**. Participants from Houston, Boston, New York, California, & France all met at the Geneva airport on January 17 to start their bus journey to the resort town of La Tania. Twelve of the group had started their trip a few days earlier with a stopover in Paris. For 2 days we went to museums, did the usual sightseeing and ate lots of wonderful food. **Kurt & Karin Schidlowski's** cousins, **Klaus & Hannelore Sterma**, drove from Germany to meet our group at the hotel, which officially made this an international group. So much to see & do and so little time, but we were up to the challenge. A few hours after our arrival, jet lagged, but not to miss a free social function, the group met for welcome drinks & appetizers sponsored by our hotel, Le Montana. With snow on the way, there was excitement in the air.

Sunday brought snow and made for some visibility troubles or was it we couldn't read the French signage??? Some skiers hoped they didn't ski off a cliff and other smart participants, like **Laura Bund** and **Julia Caldwell**, attempted to wait out the fog by eating at one of the many incredible mountain restaurants. Others, like **Diane Stotz**, **Sharon Smith**, **Sue Ann Chu**, **Sue Bean Gilliam** and **Cathey Littell** took the opportunity to explore Courchevel for the day.

Monday brought skiing for some and a day trip to Annecy & Chamonix for others. In Annecy, we hiked over to the visitor's bureau for a map of the city and began walking & walking, exploring the old churches, quaint streets and canals of Annecy. The city is known as the Venice of France and what a beautiful city it is. **Gloria Lopez** bought the best souvenir, a pretty red hat. **Andy Smith & David Stotz** were the most inquisitive about the history of the city. We then met the bus and continued on to Chamonix. Some die-hard skiers, **Don Caldwell**, **Julia Caldwell** and **Charles Albright** decided to take their chances on the slopes, even though it was a snow rain mixture. They were pleasantly surprised to find some great



snow at the top and had terrific skiing. The rest of the group went on to eat, drink and window-shop. TC, **Leslie Caldwell** met up with a New Zealand friend who was working in Chamonix. **Gayle Dale** had the most unique adventure,

as she explored a cave in the mountain and has beautiful pictures to prove it. Next time, we need to hang out with Gayle; as she really explores!

Tuesday bought a glorious ski day with lots of sun & powder for the skiers to enjoy. TC **Leslie Caldwell** saw **Leslie and Andy Cashio** with big smiles on their face while they skied down the mountain in the powder. We heard about chutes being skied by **Julia Caldwell** from **Laura Bund** and **Charles Albright**, who (foolishly) followed Julia into many

pristine runs. Other skiers, **Roger Holzman**, **Andy Smith**, and **Frank Yu** also indulged in this great day of skiing. And of course the famous foursome, **Kurt & Karen Schidlowski** and **Klaus & Hannelore Sterma**, who never missed a day of skiing.



While some of our group skied on Wednesday, others took part on a trip to Geneva. Unfortunate the bus broke down but not all was loss. A quick stop was made at a McDonald's, so TC of day, **Marsha Lutz** could coordinate to get another bus. All resolved and a larger bus came quickly. After the arrival to Geneva, all went to a visitors store to pick up maps and then on to exploring the old part of the city and of course shopping for souvenirs. **Ann Rogers** bought pretty lace doilies. Everyone was a photographer but **Fred Zahnow** took the most pictures this time. **Frank Yu** and **Sue Ann Chu** were happy exploring another unique city sine they were the "world travelers" of the group.

With Thursday, came another great sunny ski day for some and others had a morning at a historic castle/museum & wine tasting in the afternoon. The bus driver could speak English and everything ran smoothly, which was of great relief to the TC of the day, **Diane Stotz**. After the castle tour **Marsha Lutz**, **Cynthia Chandler**, **David Stotz** and **Diane Stotz** decided on lunch at a French restaurant with white lacey curtains. Little did they know that eight other participants were also dining upstairs: **Leslie & Andy Cashio**, **Sue Ann Chu**, **Frank Yu**, **Roger Holzman**, **Carmen Mikhail**, **Fred Zahnow**, and **Angela Zumwalt**. They wine, dined and were merry. Ask David about the Steak "tartar". Even the waitress said she didn't want to eat it, but did say "good luck". On to wine tasting at a family owned winery. And let's say fun had by all. OK more by some than others but all happy. And of course many wine bottles were purchased to enjoy at the hotel and take home.

Friday, our last day of skiing brought a mixture of snow & rain, which lets just say there were a few drowned rats coming home after skiing. Some gave up skiing that day to watch a polo match on a mountain airstrip! The ponies also had trouble seeing through the heavy snow! Sadly it was also the last day for French cafés, shopping, and of course the last happy hour with our ski group. This was the end of a great trip with many new friendships made and old friendships renewed.

However, 12 of the group were not ready to go home – so Ann, Gloria, Frank Sue Ann, Kurt, Karin, Marsha, Cynthia, Cathey, Sue, and Andy and Leslie Cashio went to Morocco. Due to bad weather in Geneva and a much delayed departure, they ended up spending the night at a Paris airport hotel, so the Casablanca visit was cut short. But there was time to see the highlight of the Hassan II Mosque, 4th largest in the world, filled with beautiful mosaics, and have the first taste of

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Moroccan cuisine. Actually a few of our friends that stayed Saturday night in Geneva had Moroccan food before the Moroccan 12 did!

The road to Marrakech was interesting but a little too long. The roadside views were quite eye opening at times - but at least it didn't include any of our luggage which was piled on top of the shuttle in which all 12 of us plus the driver were crammed! Luckily on the return trip we found out about the toll road which shortened the drive by over an hour. Marrakech

was very interesting and colorful. Tours were made of a royal palace, 16<sup>th</sup> c. Saadian tombs, and a beautiful garden property owned by Yves Saint Laurent. And of course they went into the souks for shopping. Some of the more seasoned shoppers went several times but others found the bartering or haggling as it often was a bit too much. But for the hardy, there were rugs, jewelry, spices, leather goods, wooden boxes, and more to eye and buy if you could come to an agreeable price. It was an ordeal for sure.

One evening, several went to a dinner show called Fantasia. It was like a Moroccan Disneyland - lots of costume and entertainment, including camel rides. Our return trip home from Casablanca had another stay at a Paris airport hotel - this one being planned though. Luckily the strike that started the next day did not delay our flight back home. We had a great time but did not want a 3rd night at a Paris airport hotel!

