



Kevin Bonnaud is hiEurope's France correspondent. Every month he reports on new and unknown places for you to discover.

默热沃
Megève



Snow Swings in Megève

By Kevin Bonnaud

Winter is not the best time of the year to play golf in Europe except in Megève. The chic and charming French Alps ski resort, famous for its upscale shops, hotels and restaurants hosts an unusual golf event in late January known as the Winter Golf Cup where participants swing their clubs on a snowy golf course while admiring the Mont Blanc.



图 /SGarnier/Commune Megeve Village

Skiers hitting the slopes of Megève's Mont d'Arbois on a January morning are the witnesses of a rare scene. The summer's 18-hole golf course, culminating at 1350m, has been reshaped into a winter course: Greens, covered with snow, are bordered with red paint, balls have turned from white to orange while golfers, driven by snowmobiles, swing their clubs wearing ski jackets, beanie hats, sweaters and gloves to warm their hands when they are not playing. The original concept was created in 2000 by Philippe Guilhem, a persuasive luxury jeweler never short of ideas with a southern accent and influential connections. "Megève has organized a snow polo tournament for years so why not imagine a snow golf competition that can be fun, off the beat and serious at the same time", Philippe Guilhem argued. The joke has turned into a major event of the winter season.

avoid pitfalls. "Snow makes trajectories too hazardous to take uncontrolled risks. Play it safe with soft shots or your golf ball may go to powder snow or hit a snowball. Using the tracks left by grooming vehicles can be very helpful", Richard Gay explains.

Make the Ball Rolling Again

A lot of work is required beforehand to guarantee a competitive contest.

Jean-Luc Biset, golf coach in Megève for 28 years and designer of the winter course, has figured out how balls can roll on the snow to provide good conditions to play and perform well.

"The field we have set looks a lot like hard wet sand we can find on a beach", Jean-Luc Biset says.

The golf course is reshaped by snow-grooming vehicles whose work heavily depends on the weather. "In case of significant snowfall, it takes more time to harden the snow and to get the best slippery surface possible. Sunny skies and low temperatures are much better even if the snow level is limited: We slightly water the greens (whites) to pack the snow so balls slide smoothly", Jean-Luc Biset adds. Shapers also intervene during the two-round competition, sealing any fissure by hand with trowels.

Social and Business Interactions

The Winter Golf Cup is not just a sporting competition. The tournament rules embody the spirit of friendship that characterizes the event. Participants are divided into teams of two golfers (golf scramble). Every team starts playing at the same time.

It's an opportunity to socialize and build business relations during and after the games. "We try to create a savory mix of personalities representing diverse professional backgrounds: Golfers, athletes, local, national and international CEOs, sponsors and celebrities from the entertainment

industry", Philippe Guilhem told hiEurope. The list of regular guests includes chief executives from BMW, Printemps, LVMH, Prince Albert of Monaco not to mention French banker Baron Benjamin de Rothschild, chairman of Edmond de Rothschild Group, and co-host of the (golf) event. Gala receptions and gourmet dinners are held throughout the weekend in restaurants owned by the famous banking family.

Megève and Golf Culture

"The Winter", as locals call it, is a celebration of the French Art de Vivre and golf culture.

"The Mont d'Arbois Golf Club, one of the oldest Alpine golf courses, was built by Henry Cotton, a famous British golf architect, in 1964, at the request of Edmond de Rothschild, a golf enthusiast", says Christian Douchement, manager of Megève Tourism bureau.

Megève is a natural golf destination as many French top executives have a residence in the village.

"A status that goes way back to the early 20th century when the Rothschild family invested in luxurious housing starting with the first palace hotel ever built in the French Alps aimed to create an upscale but quiet ski resort", Christian Douchement adds.

Snow-golfing has become trendy in Megève and elsewhere. The 2018 Winter Golf Cup tour includes stops in Val d'Isère (France) and Crans-Montana (Switzerland).

Tips

Winter Golf Cup – Megève – January 25-28

📍 www.wintergolfcup.com/en

Location

Chamonix: 30km (40min), Geneva: 70km (1h), Lyon: 190km (2h15min).



图 /Les Loges Blanches

To Stay

Les Loges Blanches 4-star hotel is a hamlet of 5 typical mountain chalets with 63 rooms and suites offering stunning views on snowy slopes, a heated pool (32°C) and a traditional restaurant.

📍 www.leslogesblanches-megève.com/en/

To Do

Horse-Drawn carriage ride, flight over the Mont Blanc, 3-km sled run, winter sports, luxurious shops, hotels and starred restaurants.



图 /Tristan Shu



图 /Daniel Durand

A Sports Challenge

The Winter Golf Cup has attracted professional golfers including Maria Verchenova, the first Russian member of the Ladies European Tour (also ambassador of the event), current and former athletes like 2002 Freestyle skiing Olympic medalist Richard Gay: a local die-hard golf enthusiast eager to take his golf shoes out the closet. "The winter golf cup makes you want to play golf again after several months of inactivity. It's cool, unconventional and quite challenging from a sporting point of view giving the instability of the soil", he told hiEurope.

The 46-year-old man has a big advantage over his contenders: As a former professional skier, he knows how to anticipate the ball paths and