

[This Years Club Trip to Venabu in Norway.](#)

This was my fourth cross country ski holiday and my second club trip following last year's week in Finland. And, like the previous 3 trips, I have been lucky enough to have enjoyed them with my cabin buddy, Anna. It seems strange to think that we both joined the club and started taking lessons just over 4 years ago, inspired by the 2014 winter Olympics, but already we have been on 4 ski holidays with other club members.

Following rave reviews about the Venabu Fellstu hotel and the surrounding ski area, this was the destination for Helen, Martin A, John, Jane, Chris, Ed, Richard S, Nigel, Anna and myself. Most booked the main hotel for 7 nights Saturday to Saturday to fit in with the hotel shuttle bus from the airport. But Anna, Richard and myself opted to fly a day early and come back a day later to benefit from cheaper, direct flights. And to give us time to do some ski shopping en route to the hotel. And Anna and I decided to book one of the cabins owned by the hotel rather than a twin or 2 single rooms. This again saved us quite a bit of money and gave us more space, a kitchen to prepare food to our own tastes, and the chance to eat breakfast in our jimjams whilst catching up with the Olympics on the tv!

But back to the journey. Anna, Richard and I took the train from Oslo airport to Lillehammer and spent the first night in the hostel at Lillehammer station. Its our third time there and, as previously, it made a lovely stop-over to break the journey. The following morning, we took the train to Ringebu where we did some ski shopping. (See the end of this article for more details on the stress of deciding what, where, when and how to buy skis!) From there we took a taxi up to the hotel. As the road curled up from the valley floor through dense forests and villages towards Venabu at 932m, we saw the extent of the snow and knew that we were in for an amazing week.

On arrival at the hotel, Richard settled into his room and Anna and I loaded up a sledge with our cases and pulled it 200 meters along a beautiful, snowy, tree-lined track to our cabin, home for the next 7 nights. And how we came to love that cabin. It was perfect. It was the best cabin out of 3 so far and somewhere we are determined to stay again. In fact, if I win the lottery I'm buying it.

It slept 4 people so there was plenty of space, with a separate bedroom and also a double 'cupboard bed' at one side of the living space. The kitchen was well resourced, the floor was under heated and we had a huge basket of wood ready for the fire. And amazing views from every window. Simply perfect.

The family run hotel itself is wonderful too, with plenty of comfy and stylish seating areas, a well-staffed ski and boot room, sauna, gym and a huge restaurant serving a vast variety of hot and cold food, all buffet style. Throughout the week, all of us were impressed with the helpfulness and friendliness of the staff across the hotel. It became apparent that most of the guests were return visitors, some had been coming back for many years.

We soon settled into a routine of meeting in the boot room each morning at 10am to look at the map and plan the days skiing. Each morning brought heavy snowfall with more snow falling most days. This meant that not all the ski tracks were prepared every day -some were too exposed and cutting these tracks would have been pointless. That said, there was plenty of skiing to be enjoyed. The hotel enjoys an elevated position with wonderful views in every direction. On clear days I felt as though I were skiing on top of the world, with miles and miles of empty tracks stretching out in every direction. There were hills with long, gradual climbs to the top, there were undulating routes that weaved through clumps of trees and past secluded cabins, there were flat tracks along frozen lakes and

there were tracks which dipped into the forest where we could gain some shelter on snowy and windy days. We had one glorious, cold but sunny day and we made the most of this by doing a longer trip involving a picnic on a hill at -16 degrees and a much-needed stop for hot drinks at a hotel on the way back. On other days we tended to do a short ski in the morning, have our packed lunch in the warmth and comfort of the hotel lounge, and then head back out again in the afternoon. In this way, everyone could pick and chose how much skiing they did, some opting for a lazy afternoon, a walk or snow shoe trip, a visit to the hotel masseur or an hour or so watching the Olympics on the TV.

Classic skis were the choice of most club members that week. This was mainly due to the weather and the snow conditions but also the fact that many of the prepared tracks nearer the hotel were quite narrow. (I think that if all the tracks had been groomed each day there would have been plenty of choice for both skate and classic.) Most of the guests in the hotel were there to take up the daily ski touring trips which were offered by the staff. They were using the heavier, metal edged skis which are perfect for those wanting to enjoy a healthy and fun week in the snow without needing cross country skills. Anna and I were both thankful that we had purchased skis -I don't think that we would have found suitable classic skis in the hire room at the hotel.

It was a fantastic week and I will definitely return to Venabu, for the gorgeous cabin, the amazing staff, the wonderful vistas and the variety of ski routes available from the hotel. And maybe, just maybe, if I can persuade my husband Rob to give it a go, this is where we will head for his first taste of cross country skiing.

Many thanks to Anna and the other 7 club members who came along to Venabu and helped to make the week a very special one.

I wonder what next year will bring.....

The Unnecessary Stress of a First-Time Ski Buyer.

2 previous ski holidays to Norway had taught Anna and I that a return holiday to the country could not be enjoyed on hire skis. In both Nordsetter and Sjusjoen, we had a fairly poor choice of hire ski. Indeed, on one of these trips, we were provided with identical skis despite being vastly different weights. As relatively new skiers, we could never be sure that it wasn't our technique that was holding us back. Or the fish scales. (Old school.) But last year in Finland we had some wonderful Atomic skin tech skis that we loved and there the decision was made. We had to have some.

In hindsight we should handed over wads of cash for those Atomic hire skis right there and brought them home with us!

But no, we didn't. Instead there followed almost a year of indecision and headaches and discussions too numerous to recount, about which skis to buy and where to buy them. "Should we buy some Atomics online and save a bit of cash" we said. "No" came lots of replies, "you need to try them, you need to get the latest technology. "Ok, shall we buy in Lillehammer on the way out" we said. "No" came the reply, you need to be able to take them back, Lillehammer is too far, buy them in Ringebu which is nearer". "Do you sell Atomics?" we emailed the shop in Ringebu. "No" came the reply, (eventually) "only Fischer and Madshus". Lots of messages from us to the ski shop in Ringebu followed, some were answered, many were not. Our detailed questions about the specifics of the various skis received answers such as "Yes you come we have skis you are welcome in our shop"

This did not fill us with confidence. We spent the entire journey worrying that we would arrive at the last possible ski buying venue before our holiday and not find suitable skis.

Happily, I can report that we both came away with a wonderful and entirely weight-specific pair of Madshus skis and a pair of well fitting boots each. And this is what we learnt from the whole stressful experience.

1. Our stress had been unnecessary.
2. To listen to the advice of our experienced skiing friends and fellow club members who are invariably right. For example, I did have to take my skis back down to the shop for a binding change on day 2. I could not have done this without a great deal of added expense had I bought from elsewhere.
3. To take heed of previous newsletter articles. (See newsletter Winter 2016/17, the article by Simon on 'mohair' skis. Thanks Simon, we went for your advice, the Madshus with adjustable bindings, they are super.)
4. Wax-less skis may not be perfect for every condition. But for once-a-year-non-racing-skiers they are easy, adequate and perfectly fine.
5. Norwegian ski shop employees can seem pretty vague and laid back but they are actually on the ball, 100% reliable. The skis we had asked for were waiting in the shop with our names on. They were the correct lengths for the correct weights. The requested bindings were ready, as were appropriate boots in the correct sizes.
6. You get a massive discount in Norway if you buy skis and boots and bindings together.
7. You do not get a discount on other stuff (Richard did not get a discount on the huge amount of kroner he spent in the shop on waxes and sprays and hats, whilst he patiently waited for us to sort the above.)

Deb Johnston