

Travel Cover story

The adoption website doesn't say much: "Paddy, friendly scruffpot, four years old." Just that, along with a series of heartbreaking pictures that show a messy little chap with liquid brown eyes, matted hair and a jagged overbite. But I can't get him out of my mind and, in July, I finally crack. I commit to my Romanian orphan from Barking Mad Dog Rescue.

Paddy arrives in London in the back of a van after three days of nonstop driving. He is tired, smelly and very scared. I want him to forget all the bad stuff, including the kill shelter from which he's been rescued, so I change his name to Parker, take him to the vet, the groomer and the dog behaviourist, and embark on a regime of kindness, consistency and cuddles. And so we fall in love.

Of course, there are issues. He is anxious. My husband is worried that we aren't responsible enough dog parents. But as we get into a routine, he blossoms, and I begin to think he deserves a holiday. I've heard about the doggy delights of the French Alps via a blog, chaletlaforet.com, written by Martha Tullberg, a Brit living in Chamonix. She calls it a canine paradise: glorious walks through Alpine meadows, furry friends welcomed in Michelin-starred restaurants, free poo bags on the streets.

Parker has seen the pictures. He deserves a taste of that paradise. He already has a passport, and had all his jabs for the journey from Romania. The admin is done. We just have to get there. At just over 28lb, he exceeds the weight restriction for most airline cabins (usually 17lb), and I don't want to put him in the

# TOP DOG

In the Alps, walkies are high-altitude and the waiters have steak to spare.

Mia Aimaro Ogden takes Parker, her new rescue dog, on his first holiday



YES, M'LADY Parker and Mia on the train and, right, on high

hold. We will drive instead. But that means a bigger car. My Mini won't hold all three of us, plus a mountain of doggy paraphernalia – crate, mattress, beanbag, food, toys, harnesses, leads.

We hire a Peugeot 2008. "I hear it won a prize from a doggy magazine," says the youth behind the Avis counter. It takes two days – 700 miles, 35 minutes in the Eurotunnel, one overnight in Girolles, six poo bags and countless wee-wee stops – to reach the mountains. Mostly, Parker just snoozes, blissed out on his giant beanbag.

Our base is Les Tines, a sunny hamlet five minutes from the centre of Chamonix, in the cuckoo-clock Chalet Scierie, which we booked through the rental company Collineige. Its pristine beds, cream sofas and outdoor Jacuzzi are supposed to be out of bounds for Parker, though I catch him sneaking guiltily off a fat armchair more than once (sorry, Chalet Scierie).

It also has a garden with excellent romping potential, a giant pile of firewood for sticks, and views to the top of Mont Blanc.

Our Alpine adventure begins in earnest when we take the red rack-and-pinion railway up to Montenvers at 6,276ft. There, a platform thrusts us out over the 4½-mile Mer de Glace, the largest glacier in France, where, in Mary Shelley's novel of 1818, Victor Frankenstein re-encounters his monster (£29 return; chamonix.com).

Parker is transfixed by the views – the ice sheets, the forests, the meadows –

**“We descend the way we came, legs wobbly but tails still waggy**



views across to the 12,605ft needlepoint peak of the Aiguille du Midi (half-day £116; chamonix-guides.eu).

But it's the last walk that's the best. We drive to the village of Le Lavancher, arriving just as the sun struggles into the valley, then climb through woods of larch, rowan and spruce for breakfast at the Chalet du Chapeau. The smell of baked cheese wafts from this tiny hut with gingham curtains at its windows. We collapse onto the terrace and watch through binoculars as two climbers are winched to safety in a chopper hovering over the 13,166ft peak of the Dent du Géant.

When I finally look away, Parker is nowhere to be seen. I call out anxiously, imagining him lost on the mountainside, or falling into the icy waters of the River Arve below. Yet when I turn, there he is, eating cheese from the hands of a Savoyard family at the other end of the terrace. "He's in heaven, *non?*" the mother says as she shoves another piece of reblochon into his greedy little mouth. He certainly is.

Mia Aimaro Ogden was a guest of Collineige, Avis and Eurotunnel. Chalet Scierie sleeps 8 and starts at £1,950 for a week (collineige.com). Avis has a week's hire of a Peugeot 2008 from £270 (avis.co.uk). Eurotunnel Le Shuttle has returns from £160 for five or more days, with an extra charge of £38 per dog (eurotunnel.com). For Barking Mad Dog Rescue donations and adoptions, see barkingmaddogrescue.co.uk

## DOGGY DOS: TAKING YOUR PET ON HOLIDAY

A no-deal Brexit might complicate things, but for now, if you want to take your dog – or cat, or ferret – to France or any other EU country, your furry friend must:

- Have a pet passport.
- Have been microchipped.
- Have been vaccinated against rabies.
- Be at least 12 weeks old at the time of travelling.
- Have a tapeworm treatment no less than 24 hours and no more than five days before returning to the UK. In Chamonix, try Dr Valérie Heirman (from £40; veterinaire-heirman.fr).

gov.uk/take-pet-abroad

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but most of all by the paragliders floating by in the sunshine, giant birds in fluoro Gore-Tex. We climb the steep track up to Signal Forbes at 7,211ft, panting in the thin air. Parker, meanwhile, strains at the lead, pulling ahead, then stopping dead on the edge of every crag, sniffing the air for the ibex, chamois and marmots that elude him below. Fortified by bread and spicy sausage (me) and tripe sticks (him), we descend the way we came, legs wobbly, but tails still waggy.

That night, all of us dine at Maison Carrier with Martha Tullberg and her Italian spinone, Daphne. While we humans get pike quenelles in a crayfish sauce, the dogs get a tickle from every waiter who walks past, and a good half a steak from the eccentric elderly gentleman at the next table (mains from £16; hameau.albert.fr). It happens again the next night, at La Fine Bouche, where the remnants of a beef fillet are put into a doggy bag, with extra treats (mains from £13; facebook.com/la-fine-bouche).

### SHAGGY DOG STORIES

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"Dogs are welcome pretty much everywhere here, from the hairdresser to the town hall," Martha says. "Restaurants will usually find you a table with extra space if you tell them you're with a dog, and will bring a bowl of water along with everyone's drinks."

The walkies continue to thrill. When sunshine turns to driving rain, Laura Bennati, from the Compagnie des Guides de Chamonix, suggests a hike along the valley floor, in the shelter of the trees, then up to the Chalet de la Floria, with

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