



# Switzerland

A SIDETRACKED GUIDE

BERNESE OBERLAND // ALPES VAUDOISES // VALAIS





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Seize the moment and let go of the rest, with lightweight, packable and breathable gear that delivers everything you need and nothing you don't. Inspired by a less-is-more philosophy, this new hiking collection has been created to allow you to move with ease on the trail, going further and faster together from dawn until dusk.



## BERNESE OBERLAND

Interlaken in the Bernese Oberland is known to some as the adventure capital of Europe, and it's easy to see why. Nearby can be found some of the finest mountains in the world, from the Jungfrau to the Eiger, as well as the glacier-fed lakes of Thun and Brienz. Mountain railways climbing into the ice world, legendary north faces, endless miles of hiking trails – it's all here.

Learn more in our destination guides, and read about Jenny Tough's adventures in and out of comfort zones as she discovers canyoning for the first time, goes hang-gliding, and contemplates the nature of her mountain connection on the Eiger.



Grindelwald  
Wengen  
Mürren  
Lauterbrunnen  
Hasliital  
**Jungfrau Region**

## VAUD / ALPES VAUDOISES

While Switzerland might be best known for its mountains, the Vaud/Alpes vaudoises region adds deeper layers to form a harmonious whole. The shores of Lake Geneva at the foot of the Alps lead to the villages of Villars, Leysin, and Château-d'Ex, each with a unique blend of adventures to sample.

We showcase the best of these – and Ebba Forsgren gets a new perspective on her life in the mountains by exploring a new area for her, from canyoning to e-biking.



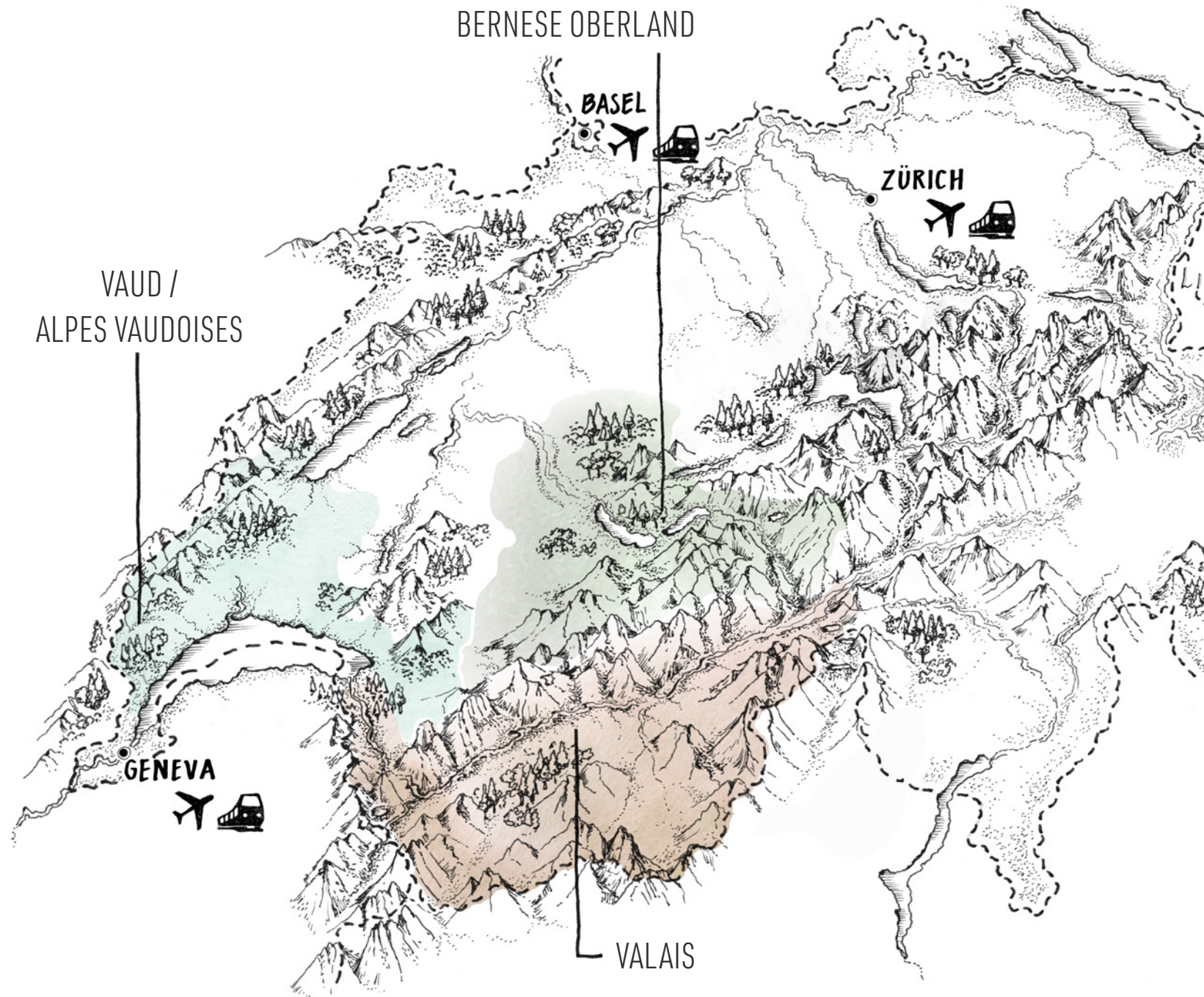
## VALAIS

The fabric of life in Valais is woven together by sheer variety – and by countless surprises. The highest peaks in Switzerland tempt mountaineers, while mineral-rich thermal baths offer relaxation and the chance to wind down after a day's adventure.

In our guide to Valais we introduce all this – and much more – while Jess Clark explores Valais from mountain to valley, finding peace in her glacier wanderings as well as a new hobby when she takes to the trails by mountain bike.



ENGRAVED ON MY HEART.



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FEATURE STORY

# HIGHS & LOWS

Exploring the Mountain Adventures of Grindelwald

WORDS: JENNY TOUGH // PHOTOGRAPHY: SAM DUGON  
LOCATION: THE JUNGFRAU REGION

Growing up in the Canadian Rockies, mountains have always been home. I've moved around a lot in my life, as did my parents, so I never grew up with the notion of 'home' being a literal house, but rather a feeling or a culture. And mountains, for me, embody all points of life.

I've made it my life's passion to pursue mountains around the world, including my personal challenge to run across a range on every continent. Completing that challenge taught me a lot about how important mountains are to me, and how I am a full version of myself whenever I am in them. But his sense of completeness isn't just about how they make me feel – it's deeper than that. Time in the mountains can be a tangible metaphor for our own unique journeys through the adventure of life itself.

This is a subject I ponder during my time in Grindelwald, an area where mountain adventure can encompass a wide variety of different things. The air in Grindelwald is distinctly high Alpine. Clouds hang low, hiding the majestic Eiger from us for now. But I don't need the high peaks just yet – the famous Grosse Scheidegg is on the agenda first.

The paved climb is closed to cars, except for a single local bus, making it a road cyclist's dream. Tight switchbacks crawl up the steep mountain pass at a brutal average gradient of 7.5 per cent. While there is a lack of motorised traffic, herds of cows wander freely across the pavement, and I sheepishly request some space as I grind my bike in the lowest gear past them. The collective sound of their bells makes for almost postcard-perfect Swiss cycling. My legs are burning by the time we reach the top, but the rain is about to set in and I have a thrilling descent ahead of me.

On the way down, the cow traffic becomes a bit more thrilling as I reel around the tight switchbacks at a much higher speed. I clamp my brakes the whole way down, and the rain sets in as we exit the traffic-free zone and return to Grindelwald town. Ups, downs, herds of cows getting in the way, and a bit of rain just to keep things interesting – I am reminded that no

endeavour is ever precisely as we imagine it will be when we begin, and that overcoming these little obstacles is part of the fun.

We wake to gloomy skies, but this time we're using the Grosse Scheidegg bus to reach the top of yesterday's col – with mountain bikes hanging on the back. It's typically Swiss-efficient to ride to the trailhead, with room for several bikes to shuttle up to the top of the pass. From our start point, it's still a long climb, now off-road, to reach the true top of the Grosse Scheidegg descent. The higher we climb, the cooler the air temperature drops, and moody clouds are closing in on the peaks. I try to climb as quickly as possible, especially as the crew are all on e-bikes and I don't want to leave them waiting. After a lung-busting climb, we reach a small hut, already crowded with hikers who have ducked in to hide from the rain that has suddenly appeared. We park the bikes and rush inside to pull on more warm layers, especially gloves for the fast descent ahead. When the rain eases a few minutes later, we get back on the bikes. I'm giddy with excitement for this part of the trip.

From the top, it's all glorious singletrack. The clouds part enough to offer sporadic views of the Eiger and his neighbours. It's a stunning place, and I take a brief moment to marvel at the glaciers and peaks before clipping in and beginning the long ride down.

The singletrack is red-graded and just about at the cusp of my comfortable level in wet conditions. A mixture of mud, slabs, rock gardens, and swoopy berms take us back down to the village. We're descending fast, hoping to beat the incoming wave of rain creeping across the valley. It's one of the longest uninhibited descents I've taken on a mountain bike, and a true highlight of my time here – despite a crash near the bottom.







Easing off the adrenaline, it's back on the gravel bike for an evening pedal. As much as I enjoyed the thrill of the singletrack, I love getting some actual pedal strokes in and – especially after my little crash – it's nice to feel stable. Gravel riding is one of the true loves of my life, and I have spent many, many hours on this bike. It's my favourite discipline for travelling long distances, enjoying big days in the saddle and traversing entire countries, or even ultra-distance racing. Today's plan is slightly more chill than those experiences, but I still feel right at home when I clip into my gravel bike.

A quick tour through the main street of Grindelwald, and I'm on a smooth gravel track down by the river, riding between the trees. It's remarkable to go from urban to nature so quickly, and one of the best things about this region. The rush of the river and the wind in my face are all I can hear now. We ride along the river, passing waterfalls and small farms, until close to sunset.

The best end to my time in the Jungfrau Region is to go back to my roots: high Alpine trail running. Although the clouds are low and menacing, we know exactly where the bucket list is: the Eiger. Along its incredible rocky flanks are myriad trails in varying levels of technicality. We find ourselves on one that depends on a series of hanging ropes to pull ourselves up smooth, steep slabs of rock. Running in between, along the ledges of this famous mountain, is quite literally a dream. Clouds below me cover the rest of Grindelwald, and I am isolated on one of the world's most iconic mountains. Despite the crowds that flock here every summer, it's amazing how quickly we can find peaceful mountain moments.

From the Eigergletscher station we are thrilled by views of the glacier's seracs tumbling down bare rocky slopes. Our route takes us up the south face of the mountain, scrambling steep terrain towards the Klettersteig Rotstock. We reach a plateau and stop to rest.

But before too long the weather swirls back in once again and we make the call to descend – a salutary reminder that adventure is in the fine line between safety and danger. It's hard to imagine that, almost 90 years before, the Eiger's North Face was the site of a drama that gripped the imagination of all Europe. Climbers dreamt of being the first to ascend the famous Nordwand, one of the biggest and most impressive mountain faces in the Alps, but equipment and techniques were rudimentary, and several young men died – notably in the 1936 disaster, in which five climbers died while trying to climb the wall. It was finally climbed in July 1938 by Heckmair, Vörg, Harrer, and Kasperek. This legendary ascent was immortalised in *The White Spider* by Heinrich Harrer. Today, with our lightweight gear and clothing that can keep us comfortable in any scenario, it's a stretch to imagine a time when these mountains were far more formidable.

Heading back home and away from the Alps, I reflect once again on how the mountains

have everything we need to prepare us for life's highs and lows. There are long, gruelling tasks, filled with scary slopes and hazards. There are insanely beautiful views. There is the freewheeling reward for hard work. There are meadows and flowers and wildlife and fresh lakes to swim in and great trails to sprint through. Whether it's for a few hours, days, or weeks, whenever I am immersed in mountains, I get to experience all of that.

I think the Swiss Alps are the ultimate mountains. They feel like the template that all mountains should be made from. The peaks themselves are beautiful, snow-capped, jagged, and wild. They're the mountains that you would draw if asked to. Between them are rolling meadows, deep green lakes, and postcard-perfect villages. Look closer, and you'll find that the Swiss Alps are criss-crossed in all directions with trails and tracks for explorers, wanderers, athletes, and enthusiasts. You can fill a whole lifetime playing in this region.

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# The Scene for any Adventure

DESTINATION GUIDE: JUNGFRAU REGION

Whether it's Bond, Sherlock, or *The Hobbit*, the Jungfrau Region is stirring with stories. Railways, waterfalls, and mountains interlace here to create a world fertile for the imagination. But the Jungfrau Region is also a place to step outside of the imaginary and ground yourself. This bowl of peaks and rivers sets the scene for any adventure.



WORDS: MEGAN BROWNRIGG // PHOTOGRAPHY: SAM DUGON

A trilogy of imposing peaks meets cosy villages in the Jungfrau Region, whose topography cradles you in possibility. This part of the Bernese Oberland features the Mönch, Eiger, and Jungfrau mountains, guarding the villages of Wengen, Grindelwald, and Mürren, as well as the Haslital and Lauterbrunnen valleys. From living life at altitude with activities like hiking, cycling, and trail running, to eking out lazy picnics in forested corners and soaking up live music in town, a summer in the Jungfrau Region is one well-spent in Switzerland.

## The Peaks of the Jungfrau Region

Modern folklore has it that the Monk (Mönch) guards the Virgin (Jungfrau) from the Ogre (Eiger). So goes the story of the region's most famous three peaks.

**Mönch** is the most climbed mountain in the Berner Oberland trilogy at 4,110m. It is often hailed as a great spot for less experienced climbers hunting an initial high-altitude experience. The Southeast Ridge is the favoured route, but the Nollen Route on the opposite side offers a much steeper, icier, and more exposed challenge for the more experienced. The Jungfrau Railway runs through Mönch's interior as a punchy artery at 3,300m.

**The Eiger's** North Face is renowned throughout the world, and climbers have been obsessed with it for more than a century. At 1,800m, this vertical mile of limestone stands plated in ice for much of the year, although it is now largely ice-free in summer. Full disclosure, its nickname Mordwand means 'murder wall'. The most accessible route to its 3,967m summit is via the West Flank and West Ridge.

**Jungfrau** is the highest peak of the three. At 4,158m, it dominates the Lauterbrunnen Valley. The Ordinary Route feels unfairly named, but is a short and relatively easy way to the mountain's summit. Most climbers hunker down in the Mönchsjochhütte, Switzerland's highest serviced mountain hut, before their ascent.

## Events

The Jungfrau Region is a centre for events from international races to markets and world-class music. Sporting offerings include the SWISSMAN Xtreme Triathlon in Grindelwald in June, and the Eiger Bike-Challenge in August.

For something gentler on the knees, music is also a huge thing here. At weekends, just ask around to find an intimate folk gig in the local area. If you're a rocker lucky enough to be here in summer, head to the famous mountain village of Grindelwald where the Eiger Rock Festival is held.



## PHOTOS

01: A local at the top of the Grosse Scheidegg // ©Sam Dugon

02: Gravel biking along the river // ©Sam Dugon

03: Mountain bike adventures // ©Sam Dugon

04: Scrambling up the Eiger's south face // ©Sam Dugon

## Villages

The villages of the Jungfrau region offer warm bulbs of shelter and scattered magnets of community in the mountains.

### Grindelwald

Grindelwald is set in a glacial hollow at the feet of Wetterhorn and the Eiger's North Face. Around 300km of hiking trails are accessible from here. Seasoned cyclists can meander up the asphalt road to Bussalp, and trail runners will earn their rite of passage on the Grindelwald Trail 21, where we recommend a pit stop at the Waldspitz mountain inn.

A great spot to dine on the square is Restaurant Kreuz & Post Terrace, or in the sketchbook-cosy Challi Stübli. If you're looking for somewhere to rest your head for the night, Hotel Bergwelt has you sorted for a banging breakfast and balconied rooms with mountain views, while Hotel Fiescherblick offers cosy Nordic simplicity.

### Wengen

Only accessible by railway, in many ways this village has managed to defy time. Set above the Lauterbrunnen Valley, Wengen is framed by the Bernese Alps, including Jungfrau as its backdrop. Its Alpine views – best admired from the Wengernalp Railway – perhaps explain why J.R.R. Tolkien, author of *The Lord of the Rings*, chose to stay in Wengen.

The Männlichen hike from Wengen via the Eiger Ultra Trail is one of the best in the region, and allows you to soak up the most enchanting highlights of the Lauterbrunnen Valley in just 5km. Wengen offers a traditional Victorian-style stay in Hotel Regina, which also houses the restaurant Chez Meyers.

### Lauterbrunnen

Lauterbrunnen is a land of 72 waterfalls. It's no surprise that 19-year-old Tolkien found himself exploring here – it's famously reminiscent of Middle-Earth's Rivendell. Lauterbrunnen is also home to one of the highest free-falling waterfalls in Europe, Staubbach Falls.

For trail runners, the Lauterbrunnen Obersteinberg Classic Loop runs 19km from the town of Stechelberg.



## Highlights

### THE TOP OF EUROPE

Jungfrauoch station sits at 3,454m above sea level and is reached through tunnels carving through the belly of mountains to reach the pass between Jungfrau and Mönch. The railway is the highest in Europe and was the brainchild of Swiss entrepreneur Adolf Guyer-Zeller, who died 13 years before it was completed in 1912.

Arriving at this pass, snow and glaciers cloak every surrounding, even in summer. Aletsch is the largest glacier in the Alps, but even this one is retreating. Visiting it is a chance to bear witness to how this colossal stream of ice should be protected.

Hidden in Jungfrauoch's frozen theatre of rock and ice is the Sphinx Observatory, an international research station. Although the astronomical observatory itself is not open to the public, its spectacular viewing deck is. The elevator that takes you there ascends 108m in just 25 seconds.

## Highlights

### SCHILTHORN

Schilthorn is a 2,970m peak accessible by cable car from Mürren. Trust us when we say that there are worse commutes than this flight above the Lauterbrunnen Valley. And the setting of the 1969 Bond film *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* is now a 360° revolving restaurant. Your view for the evening will feature over 200 Alpine peaks including Eiger, Mönch, and Jungfrau.

### GRINDELWALD FIRST – TOP OF ADVENTURE

The adventure park atop First Mountain near Grindelwald is reached by gentle gondola, but getting back down quickly ramps up the stakes. You might choose to zip on the First Flyer, float on the First Glider, or test-drive an offroad scooter (Trottibike).

Before you choose your chariot, though, there are things to be enjoyed around the mountain summit. The hike to the lake of Bachalpsee is a rewarding one given the water's gemstone colour and clarity. For thrills, try the cliff walk to Tissot.

## USEFUL LINKS

[madeinbern.com](http://madeinbern.com)

[jungfrauregion.swiss](http://jungfrauregion.swiss)

[myswitzerland.com](http://myswitzerland.com)

Meanwhile it's an attractive walk to Kleine Scheidegg mountain pass, or for a leisurely wander head to Trümmelbach Falls.

Lauterbrunnen is a great spot to explore camping instead of hotel stays; Camping Jungfrau and Camping Breithorn are both strong options

### Mürren

Lying at the foot of the Schilthorn, Mürren is now forever entangled with the glamour and mystery of 007. Despite this, it maintains a cosy anonymity, largely thanks to it being another car-free location peppered with wooden chalets.

A favourite biking trail in the area is the 15.7km Rotstockhütte loop. There's also the Mürren Via Ferrata, which dangles you down into Gimmelwald. If you fancy going the other way instead, the Allmendhubel funicular will carry you a peaceful 500m to the tiny hamlet.

Foodies should venture to Hotel Jungfrau for Malaysian specialties, and to Cafe Liv for a tasty vegan snack. Meanwhile, the family-run Eiger Guesthouse is famed for its fondue, thin-crust pizza, and homely rooms. Travellers can enjoy the dormitory experience at Gimmelwald Mountain Hostel.

### Haslital

Home to the scene of Sherlock Holmes's final case before he tumbled down the Reichenbach Falls with his nemesis Moriarty, the Haslital has long been etched in legend. Slightly further afield, at Aare Gorge, a bright blue ribbon of water cuts through a corridor of rock with surging clarity.

The Alpen Tower high above Haslital offers a 360° panorama over 401 peaks in the Bernese and Central Alps. And the Haslital plateau stands on the Hasliberg mountain, which is a springboard for some incredible hikes. Horizontweg is a great route combining the Alpen Tower and the meadows of Engstlenalp and Tannalp across 10km.

The Bahnhöfli Restaurant and Pizzeria can be found in Hotel Meiringen, which is known for its friendly staff with a strong knowledge of the area. And Rössli Restaurant is the place to go for a steak.





FEATURE STORY

# IN & OUT OF COMFORT ZONES

Mountains are a constant that ground me – but this doesn't mean that I'm always comfortable in their presence. Comfort can mean different things. Sometimes enjoyment is about relaxation, doing something well within my capabilities. Sometimes it's about pushing far beyond that point into the personal unknown. Comfort zones are there to be tested, broken, moved, and used to find the right balance between all the different factors that make mountain adventure so much fun.

WORDS: JENNY TOUGH  
PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN SUMMERTON & SAM DUGON  
LOCATION: INTERLAKEN

I lean over the edge of the highway barrier, staring down the long drop to the riverbed below. Steve, our outdoor guide, is looping a rope around the barrier, and says something about lowering me down backwards. The stone wall falls steeply and then disappears beneath a ledge. I decide to stop looking down, and instead just watch the sun making its way above the trees behind us. The crew want to wait until the sunlight hits the canyon, and, thinking about the cold meltwater rushing below, I'm keen to agree.

I've never been canyoning before. I always assumed it was a tourist thing, and while it probably still is, it's worth the hype. Steve leads us down the twists of the Grimsel Canyon, telling us where to aim our feet or avoid hitting our heads as we jump, slide, and at one point even rope swing down through the cascading water. It's a fun game to turn a river into a playground. I am intrigued by this adrenaline-fuelled use of nature. Our teeth are chattering by the end, but we emerge from the deep gorge into beautiful sun and are soon basking in the warmth while refuelling on sandwiches. No major incidents, despite the abundance of opportunity to slide or jump the wrong way, and we're all a mix of relief and energised.

Even in September, the late-summer sun is bright and the trails are dry and warm. Back in my comfort zone, in the saddle of my gravel bike, we're exploring the trails around Interlaken – cruising through the forest, monster climbs and speedy descents, with the tranquil turquoise waters of Lake Thun and Lake Brienz below us. It's a paradise for cycling. Official cycle route signage inspires us with a multitude of options. We see mountain bikers and roadies – and also the proliferation of e-bikes to assist riders with the incredible elevation that the Alps demand. I've been lucky enough to cycle in over 40 countries by now, and Switzerland is always a clear favourite.

It's early morning when we arrive on the shores of Lake Brienz at Hightide Kayak school. I grew up around boats, but haven't been paddling for years. I'm beyond excited to get on the water. Other than the departing paddleboat ferry from the town every hour, the lake is tranquil. My paddle strokes slice through the water – the only noise or movement on this blue-sky morning. I cut across the lake, eager to explore the rocky banks on the northern side. Intricate rock formations from the high Alps above plunge into the lake. We feel as if we're the only people around for miles. ▶▶



After a couple hours of paddling, we pull the boats onto a small rocky beach so we can run in for a swim. I've been eager to get into the water since first seeing the lake yesterday, and the clean, crisp water is as perfect as I imagined it would be – a comforting blanket that I pull around my body. I never want to get out, but the boats need to be returned, so reluctantly I haul myself into my kayak and paddle back across the lake. I can't think of a better way to start a day in Interlaken than on the water.

Views from the hilltops above Interlaken are predictably marvellous. The preserved village, with its church steeples and grand hotels, is a bustling dot dropped next to the wide green lakes and majestic Alpine peaks. And I'm about to take in the view in a whole new way, stretching comfort zones a little – from the sky. My Bumblebee hanggliding instructor explains the take off to me, and before I know it we are sprinting towards a precipitous edge of the grassy hill. And voila. We're in the air.

Hang-gliding has to be the optimal way to fly. Laying prone, with arms outstretched, you get to actually pretend you're a bird. We cruise around, taking wide turns, looking for trails to run on later. It's a different way to explore the mountain environment than anything I've known, but the feelings it elicits within me are familiar ones: joy, exhilaration, that distant-horizon sensation of exploring somewhere near. The landing comes before I know it, and we descend faster than I think I'm really comfortable with into an empty field.

A small but beautiful red train with wooden benches waits at Wilderswil station to take us up to Schynige Platte. Lurching up the impossibly steep ascent, the train takes us far above the clouds and into the Alpine. At every turn on the climb, we lean out the window, eager to take more photos as the view gets better and better.

When the train reaches its terminus at the highest point of the track, we disembark. The air is thinner at just over 2,000m altitude. Spectacular views envelop us from all sides. Countless hiking options start from here, and I can see trails darting off every which way,

igniting thoughts of potential adventures. This is one thing I truly love about the Alps – the endless choice for where to go and what to do next. But, just as in life, we must eventually choose one thing to do out of many options – one view, one adventure. Followed by the next, and then the one after that. So, beyond excited, I take my first step on the rocky path towards the summit of the Schynige ridge.

We end our journey strolling through an Alpine botanical garden, lovingly cared for at altitude, before heading inside the mountain restaurant for a post-hike lunch. No Bernese hike is ever complete without a Röstli.

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There couldn't be a better way to say goodbye to Interlaken than with a trail run above the town. A packed funicular takes us up Harder Kulm. As we disembark, to one side is a beautiful restaurant where tourists enjoy fondue with a view, and to the other is the start of a lovely trail between the trees, leading up to the ridge of Harder Kulm that we had seen from the sky a couple hours ago. My feet safely on the earth for what feels like the first time today, I run excitedly up the rocky and rooty single-track. Eventually, after a lung-busting climb, it emerges from the trees to the spiny ridge overlooking both sides of the mountain.

We eventually descend back to the top of the funicular station, joining the crowds piling on. Now, on the descent, the atmosphere amongst passengers is distinctly different to how it had been on the way up – as if the time at altitude provided a dose of serenity to everyone who made the journey up Harder Kulm. It's a familiar feeling. No matter where I roam or how I probe my comfort zones, mountains always provide me with that sense of contentedness, and it's affirming to see it reflected on so many other faces. Mountains are a touchstone I can depend upon, even when taking a step beyond. The carriage is quiet as the funicular makes its smooth way down the steep mountain, returning us to the village at sunset. It's time for pizza and rest.

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# The Adventure Capital of Europe

## DESTINATION GUIDE: INTERLAKEN

Escape the ordinary in Interlaken by immersing yourself in unforgettable outdoor adventures. Experience the thrill of gliding soundlessly over 4,000m peaks. Navigate whitewater rapids, explore mountain bike trails, and hike over panoramic mountain ridges. Then slow the pace on a nostalgic railway journey, meander through the picturesque lakeside town, and indulge in Swiss cuisine infused with wild Alpine herbs.

WORDS: HARRIET OSBORNE // PHOTOGRAPHY: SAM DUGON

Interlaken is an idyllic Swiss town situated in a narrow valley between two glacier-fed lakes, with views of the Eiger, Mönch, and Jungfrau mountains in the distance. Heralded as the Adventure Capital of Europe, Interlaken is perfectly placed to access a huge range of adrenaline-fuelled outdoor experiences all year round. There is something for everyone in this spectacular region in the heart of Switzerland.

### Hiking

#### Lake Brienz (accessible)

The 5.36km trail from Iseltwald to Giessbach is one of Switzerland's most beautiful lakeside walks. Starting from the former fishing village of Iseltwald, the route stays close to the banks of Lake Brienz's turquoise waters before ending at the Giessbach jetty, where you can take a 10-minute climb up the hill or take a ride on Europe's oldest funicular cable railway to Grand Hotel Giessbach.

#### Bällenhöchst (challenging)

At 2,095m above sea level, Bällenhöchst is one of the most beautiful viewing points in the Bernese Oberland. Starting from the charming mountain village of Saxeten, this 14km trail winds across flower-filled meadows, past Alpine huts, and up to the slopes of Sulegg. The strenuous ascent is rewarded with magnificent views of Leissig and Därlig mountain ridges.

*Tip: You can avoid part of the steep descent by taking the cable car down from Sulwald to Isenfluh.*

### Mountain Biking

Now you've found your footing, it's time to cover more ground. Mountain biking, e-biking, touring, and road cycling are some of the most popular ways to explore this sporty region. Here are our top picks.

#### E-bike Tour around Lake Thun (accessible)

Reach a meditative state as you glide along the 54.3km circular trail around Lake Thun. Starting from Sigriswil, the loop reveals ever-changing views of the deep turquoise waters and surrounding mountains to Oberhofen and via Hünibach to Thun. Recharge your batteries in the friendly

## Highlights

#### HARDER KULM

At 1,322m above sea level, Harder Kulm promises top-down views over all of Interlaken and into the mountain valleys beyond. It's an easy way to get your bearings at the start of your trip or recap an adventure well spent.

#### BRIENZER ROTHORN

All aboard the Brienz Rothorn as the steam train and its red carriages transport you through lush forests with panoramic views of the surrounding mountains and Lake Brienz on this hour-long ride.

#### SCHYNIGE PLATTE

Starting from Wilderswil station, Schynige Platte Railway chugs along and up the mountainside to Schynige Platte, a mountaintop plateau with hiking trails and views across to Interlaken.



## PHOTOS

01: Mountain biking // ©Matt Green

02: Kayaking Lake Brienz // ©Sam Dugon

03: Hiking above the Schynige Platte // ©John Summerton

04: Descending into the Grimsel Canyon // ©John Summerton

town of before getting back in the saddle. The tour continues via Gwatt and Spiez to Därligen and back to your starting point in Sigriswil.

**Don't miss:** Two highlights await when you cross the 340m-long and 180m-high panoramic suspension bridge at Sigriswil and the 142m-long suspension bridge at Leissigen.

### Downhill trails and dirt park

If a fast and action-packed agenda is more your thing, put your skills to the test on a technically demanding flow trail. The bike park on the Wiriehorn offers several downhill stages, trails, and a skills park. The Dirt Jump Park in Steffisburg has 16 jumps, a woodchip landing, and a big quarter pipe. Jumps are divided into four lines, offering training opportunities for beginner to experienced riders.

### River Rafting

There are two whitewater rivers perfect for rafting – the Simme is a gentle journey for families and groups, while the Lütschine has wild rapids and an adrenaline rush.

#### River Rafting Simme (accessible)

Located in one of the most idyllic Swiss regions, the Simme is a fun, scenic Class II–III river ideal for school groups (minimum age is 10), families, or perhaps companies. This experience is a 4.5-hour round trip from Interlaken with 1.5–2 hours on the river.

#### River Rafting Lütschine (challenging)

The Lütschine offers some of the best whitewater rafting in the Swiss Alps, suitable for athletic, adventurous people who are confident swimmers. Starting from the foot of the Eiger, the river surges down from the mountains over Class III–IV rapids. You'll need 4 hours for this round trip, with 1.5–2 hours on the water.

### Kayaking

For a more peaceful experience on the water, see Interlaken from a new perspective on a half-day or evening kayaking tour.



01



03



02



04

### Where to Stay

A room with a view is almost always a given in this region of Switzerland. From high-end hotels to budget-friendly hostels, rest easy in our top picks of places to stay.

#### THE HEY HOTEL

Kick off your hiking boots and relax with a cold beverage at this uber-cool hotel with cloud-like beds in earthy tones, an inviting sun terrace, and good-mood food that you'll want to share with family and friends. Rooms are available from £125.45.

#### VILLA SONNENHOF

With views of the magnificent Jungfrau, this is not just any backpacker's hostel. The Villa Sonnenhof is comfortable, cool, and central, with accommodation ranging from dorms to double rooms with shared and ensuite facilities. Rooms are available from £27.19.

### Eating & Drinking

#### RESTAURANT STADTHAUS

Serving up nostalgic Swiss charm in the heart of the old town since 1818. Restaurant Stadthaus reopened in 2014 with a new concept devised by renowned Swiss TV chef René Schudel: Alpine classics from the kitchen, wines from Switzerland, and three regional beers on tap.

#### SALZANO RESTAURANT

Refuel with a hearty bowl of oak tree soup or satisfy your sweet tooth with pine tree ice cream. Inspired by their spa, which uses all-natural materials and ingredients, the team has transferred the same ethos into the kitchen.

## USEFUL LINKS

[madeinbern.com](http://madeinbern.com)

[interlaken.ch](http://interlaken.ch)

[myswitzerland.com](http://myswitzerland.com)

### Half-day kayaking (accessible)

Starting from The Beach in Bönigen on the shores of Lake Brienz, a certified guide will help you develop your paddling skills. They will lead you across the lake to the north shore, exploring the waves below steep cliffs.

### Canyoning

Canyoning involves navigating down a mountain stream on foot, travelling with the water as it descends the gorge.

#### Canyoning Grimsel (accessible)

After rappelling 50m into the gorge down a cliff, follow the flow of the water on foot or by jumping into pools and sliding down wet rock slabs – nature's own water slide. This trip is 5.5 hours, with 1.5–2 hours in the canyon. The minimum age is 14.

#### Canyoning Chli Schliere

This canyon is considered the best in the region because it has the highest jumps and longest slides – it's also the most challenging (mentally and physically), suitable for confident, athletic people who like getting wet. This is a 7.5-hour round trip from Interlaken with 3–4 hours in the canyon. The minimum age is 14.

#### Hang Gliding (accessible)

See Interlaken from the air, enjoy the views of Lake Thun's deep-blue waters, and glide above the three peaks of Eiger, Mönch, and Jungfrau. In this 10–20-minute hang gliding experience, you will descend around 800m in altitude before landing in Höhematte Park in the centre of Interlaken.

#### Skydiving (challenging)

Fly over the mountain peaks and feel the adrenaline rush as you take the leap of a lifetime. Experience a bird's-eye view of Lake Thun, Lake Brienz, and the surrounding mountains and glaciers as you free-fall into Bernese Oberland.

**Good to know:** The Interlaken guest card gives you free travel on scheduled public transport services. Cardholders also receive discounts on local excursions and many activities throughout the entire region.





FEATURE STORY

# FROM MOUNTAIN TO VALLEY

Exploring the Landscapes and Nature of Valais

WORDS: JESS CLARK // PHOTOGRAPHY: RACHEL KEENAN  
LOCATION: VALAIS

Last night I made the short journey from Chamonix, over the Col de la Forclaz and down into the Swiss Alps. Leaving the car park I wandered through the quiet streets towards our hotel. Saas-Fee is a car-free village and the Valais region is famed for its sustainability, boasting vast hydroelectric and solar infrastructure.

**W**hen I moved to the Alps I was doing research on Alpine air pollution and have long regarded Saas-Fee/Saastal and Zermatt as the gold standard for car-free Alpine infrastructure. The air here is light, free of diesel fumes and wood smoke, and the moonlight is dancing on the glaciated peaks above. I am no stranger to the Pennine Alps, but this is my first time visiting Saas-Fee and I can't wait for morning to come.

## Saas-Fee/Saastal

After a suitably cheese-heavy breakfast I meet my guide Danny and we walk to the Spielboden gondola which takes us up to Längfluh. I feel as though I've entered a portal back to winter – we're at 2,870m, the sky is clear, and the wind icy fresh off the glacier above. Saas-Fee/Saastal, surrounded by 18 mountains over 4,000m. Just a few months ago, I spent almost three weeks on an ambitious challenge (Alpine X) to climb and ski the 10 highest peaks in the Alps. Despite attempting every peak, dangerous conditions caused by a dry winter and record-breaking heatwaves left the project incomplete. I saw first-hand how drastically the mountains are being transformed and learnt more about risk management than I have in the last decade.

Roped up, we walk onto the vast Fee Glacier. It is my first time back in the mountains since Alpine X. I hear the crunch of old snow and the cracking of ice beneath my crampons. The glacier is barren and isolated, its landscape almost lunar, with crevasses gaping like craters. I've come to crave these otherworldly environments. It is in the high Alpine I feel most alive.

As we finish the glacier walk and return to safe ground, the rumbling of our stomachs leads us to the nearby Längfluh restaurant, named

after a rocky outcrop of the Pennine Alps that divides the Fee Glacier. You can venture a bit higher, to the world's highest revolving restaurant at 3,500m, but our bellies are empty and our schedule pressing. I order a rosti and strudel, the classics. Once a hearty breakfast food for Swiss-German farmers, the rosti was thought to mark the dividing line between the German and French-speaking parts of Switzerland.

After a quick change I meet Laura, a young mountain enthusiast interning in Saas-Fee. She takes me to her favourite running trail, just above her house and behind the Hannig lift station. There is no shortage of varied terrain here, but a local always knows best. On the way up I barely draw breath as we share an infectious vivacity for all things Alpine. But a sharp scream stops me mid-sentence. 'Oh that's just the marmots, they're everywhere,' she replies casually. We set off running at a pleasant pace over undulating singletrack. I try to hide my heavy breathing – we are at altitude and I have recently returned from the beach.

Soon we drop into a shallow ravine and scramble down the rocks for a drink. The water is bitterly cold, flowing straight off the glaciers above. As we look out to the mountains across the valley Laura points out other trail-running routes she has recently discovered, and I suggest ski tours to try over the coming winter. My mind wanders to the other adventure possibilities opened up by the SaastalCard – included from our first night stay onward, and giving free access to the cable cars in the Saas Valley.

## Leukerbad

Last night we arrived in Leukerbad, a small town at the foot of the Gemmi Pass renowned for its thermal baths. There are 65 springs







pumping 3.9 million litres of hot, mineral-rich water to a vast network of spas every single day.

Last summer my friend Aaron invited me on a cycling trip coast to coast across the Pyrenees. The trip was a brutal introduction to bikepacking, with harsh conditions, heavy packs, and over 2,000m of elevation gain a day. Having now completed several other routes, my sights are turning to more technical trails. The next logical step is mountain biking.

As we wait for the wet, heavy cloud to lift, I grow apprehensive. Thankfully Christian is here to reassure me. Local farmer, ski instructor, and mountain bike guide, he knows these mountains better than anyone. We board the Torrent Gondola up to the beginning of my warm-up run. It's a newly designed flow trail covering 400 vertical metres back down to the lift station, with a clearly marked but frankly intimidating start gate. My trepidation quickly turns to excitement and a familiar rush of adrenaline, outwardly expressed as childish whoops of joy.

In Leukerbad it is permitted to ride your

bike on all types of trails and tracks. With my newfound confidence we decide to pedal uphill towards some slightly more challenging natural (but homologated) trails. I'm hooked, already asking how I can improve and what bike I should be buying. Enamoured with my new hobby, I pedal to the chime of cowbells, almost forgetting the throbbing pain from muscles used in a new way.

We reach our high point: the top of a seemingly endless trail with views across the Swiss Alps. Christian is also a fan of steep skiing, and now he points out the Weisshorn: a conspicuous sharp white peak whose east face has recently made its way onto my bucket list. In 2019 I skied my first steep line, the Couloir Gervasutti on Tour Ronde. On that first 50 pitch I felt a rush of adrenaline, a healthy dose of fear, and a spark that would ignite my sustained fascination for exposed and aesthetic steep lines.

I begin my descent with Christian telling me to stay soft and look ahead. With each switchback my confidence grows and I pick up speed. It's a

welcome break for my cramping hands, which have spent the morning clenched on the brakes. But we reach a roadblock: a flock of adorable Valais Blacknose nose sheep scattered across the trail, forcing us to stop and dismount while they pass. They're a domestic breed originating in the Valais region, and have been dubbed the 'cutest sheep in the world' due to their fluffy bear-like appearance. Well rested after pausing to admire the sheep, I set off with newfound conviction. I swoop round corners and edge over rocks with a growing sense of pride, but am quickly humbled by an unplanned tree hug. Back in the saddle, still laughing, we roll into town ready to soak tired, aching muscles in the spa.

### Veysonnaz

The small village of Veysonnaz marks our transition from German to French-speaking Valais. Nestled in the heart of the 4 Vallées, it boasts beautiful views over the Rhône Valley towards the Bernese Alps. Today's exploration will be on foot. I take a scenic trail to Cabane

d'Essertze, then to Mont-Rouge and back over several mountain ridges. The start of my run is all uphill with sections of exposed scrambling toward a classic Alpine summit cross. From here I have a faint view of the Matterhorn, its classic Toblerone silhouette ever prominent amongst the mountains. Here I take a few minutes to gain my bearings – I hope to become better at identifying Alpine peaks, thereby fostering an improved sense of direction. Still on track, I begin my descent, the hard work behind me as I cruise down the mountain for lunch.

After a fast-paced morning I meet Samantha, a softly spoken yoga instructor who exudes a sense of calm. She leads me to the start of the Yoga Path: a guided trail through the green larch forest of Magrappé. The seven stations combine postures and exercises based on strength, concentration, relaxation, and inner focus. The path begins at the Bisse de Vex, a traditional open irrigation system dating from the 15th century. At the first station I lay out my mat and take long, cleansing breaths in Baddha Konasana





or butterfly pose. The trail seems well aligned with the ancient Japanese relaxation practice of forest bathing or *shinrin-yoku*.

As we walk between asanas I find myself in a new mental posture, a sort of active meditation. I recently discovered the importance of mental control in fear management, pledging to commit to regular meditation and breathwork. In exposed terrain, particularly at altitude, it is easy to become short of breath, firing up the sympathetic nervous system in a damaging negative feedback loop. I've learnt that physicality is often just a small part of ski mountaineering and alpine pursuits. Eventually we reach my favourite pose, Shavasana, where Samantha leaves me to lie restfully with my thoughts.

### Champéry – Region Dents Du Midi

Having moved further down the valley, I find myself back on the French border – this time in one of the oldest tourist destinations in Switzerland. Champéry is in the Region Dents du Midi and is one of the founding villages of the Portes du Soleil ski area. I wake up with a view over a high street laced with Swiss bunting and windows bursting with iconic Victorinox penknives. It is inoffensively patriotic, with all the authentic charm of yesteryear.

I set off on a highly recommended circular hike in the Val d'Illiez, fuelled by the promise of waterfalls and fondue. Starting in Grand-Paradis, the trail leads me through an idyllic forest along the River Saufla, and soon arrives at my first rewards: the Cascade de la Saufla and Cascade de Bonnavau. The crashing waters form a humid mist, wetting my cheeks and beading off my jacket. Emerging from the forest, the path has been cut into the mountain. I pass under an impressive

overhanging roof of rock and up some roughly cut steps equipped with a via-ferrata-style hand rail. Out of nowhere appears a 55m-long suspension bridge: the Passerelle Belle-Étoile.

Farmers in the region are increasingly using Patou or other livestock guard dogs in response to the return of large carnivores, such as wolves. I come across a flock of sheep, closely minded by their big fluffy companion, which resembles a mix between a polar bear and a golden retriever. You would be mistaken in thinking that these animals are cuddly. I give him and his sheep a wide berth and traverse the last section of trail before my final destination. The Refuge de Bonnavau is made up of a collection of quintessential Swiss cabins, perched on a bucolic Alpine plateau between Grand-Paradis and the Susane Valley. The guardian, Christine, recommends a wild garlic fondue with artisanal Valais IPAs, each beer named after a local peak. The word 'fondue' comes from the French verb *fondre* (to melt), with roots in the Swiss canton of Fribourg. With the subject of cheese my thoughts inevitably turn to Raclette du Valais AOP – more molten cheese goodness. *Mmmmm*.

The landscapes and nature of Valais are undeniably its greatest assets, from larch forests across Alpine hillsides to boundless glaciers shadowed by towering 4,000m peaks – and all enjoyed in a Mediterranean-like climate. The region boasts 2,000 hours of annual sunshine and is the largest wine region in Switzerland, with over 50 varieties of grapes, some unique to the region (including the famous Petite Arvine). I am truly sold and honestly reluctant to leave. I finish my trip looking up at the spectacular Ryan Glacier, dunking crusty bread into a vat of garlic and Swiss cheese, and planning my return in winter.

All experiences from the article can be booked on the Valais shop: [www.visitvalais.ch/shop](http://www.visitvalais.ch/shop)  
@jess.k.clark // @rachelkeenan9 // @johnsummerton // @mattgreen\_sfm





A hiker with a red backpack is walking away from the camera on a rocky, narrow trail. In the background, a waterfall cascades down a rocky cliff. The hiker is wearing a light green long-sleeved shirt and dark pants. The backpack is bright red with the brand name 'MONTANE' visible. The scene is lush with green grass and foliage.

# A Land of Contrasts

DESTINATION GUIDE: VALAIS

All too often, we must compromise when selecting a destination for our adventures. Good for the high peaks? There might not be much to do at lower elevations. But Valais requires little compromise – at any time of year.

WORDS: ALEX RODDIE // PHOTOGRAPHY: RACHEL KEENAN

## Nendaz & Veysonnaz

Ideally located in the heart of the Valais, Nendaz & Veysonnaz offers breathtaking views of the Rhône Valley and is at the doorstep to the 4 Vallées, the biggest ski area in Switzerland. From the Mont-Fort (10,925 ft), accessible by mountain lift, the panoramic view of the Alps, and notably of the Matterhorn and the Mont-Blanc, is truly exceptional. The region's network of bisses provides the perfect blueprint for lower-level walking adventures. These ancient waterways were constructed to divert water from rivers to irrigate crops and orchards. Small irrigation canals dug into the ground, carved, or suspended on rock walls, they are invariably bordered by paths. This offers an unusual way to explore the area, gaining perspectives on the surrounding landscape that would not be possible any other way.

## Region Dents Du Midi

The Region Dents du Midi encompasses six charming villages perched high in the Swiss Alps near the south-eastern end of Lake Geneva. Les Portes du Soleil, the world's largest international ski area, includes the villages of Champéry, Les Crosets, Champoussin, Morgins, Troistorrents, and Val-d'Illiez – all secluded within the spectacular valley of Val d'Illiez. This is a year-round mountain playground. Visiting in summer? 800km of trails for hiking and 600km for mountain biking are just outside your front door. Alpine restaurants and sunny terraces can be found at strategic intervals – no matter your preferred adventure or the time of year. A biker's and hiker's paradise.

## Highlights

### NENDAZ TREKKING

This four-day tour around Nendaz & Veysonnaz is around 53km in length and makes use of the network of cabins in the mountains. This tour is aimed at the average but physically fit hiker. Depending on weather conditions, the trails are open from July to mid-September.

### WHERE TO EAT

La Taverne de l'Alpée offers a range of Swiss dishes, including fondues, röstis, cheese bakes, and buckwheat pancakes. A sunny terrace is the perfect place to enjoy your meal in the summer, and there are game specialities in the autumn.

### WHERE TO STAY

The Chalet Royal offers 56 beautiful rooms with a breathtaking panoramic view in the heart of the resort. It also features a spa, a conference room and an underground car park.

## Highlights

### GUIDED MOUNTAIN BIKING

Those new to the sport or seasoned riders alike can take advantage of expertly tuned advice and knowledge in Europe's largest biking area. Setting off from one of the villages in Region Dents du Midi, you will explore the 12 resorts and five bikeparks between France and Switzerland.

### WHERE TO EAT

If you are looking for panoramic views while you dine, look no further than the Croix-de-Culet. Its location – at the Champéry-Planachaux cable car arrival station – could hardly be more convenient. A wide selection of seasonal dishes and local specialities are on offer.

### WHERE TO STAY

In Les Crosets, Hôtel L'Etable makes a compelling option for a mountain getaway. A calming wooden aesthetic combines with traditional home-made Swiss dishes in the restaurant. 17 elegant Alpine-style rooms are on offer and rates start from CHF195 per night.



## PHOTOS

01: Trail running to Cabane d'Essertze

02: Hiking in the Val d'Illiez

03: Glacier hiking in Saas-Fee

04: Mountain biking in Leukerbad

©Rachel Keenan & John Summerton



## Saas-Fee/Saastal

Many regions can lay claim to being unique, but in the case of Saas-Fee/Saastal this is truly justified. What other Alpine valley is surrounded by 18 4,000m peaks and countless lower ones? There is almost too much to choose from – and certainly more than enough for a summer (or three) of adventure. This world-class mountain and glacier landscape is famous for Alpine climbing, biking, and hiking. Alpinists can test themselves on the icy summits of Strahlhorn or Alphubel, while hikers looking for something a little less extreme can take advantage of the endless trails criss-crossing the slopes and forests at lower elevations. Thanks to the SaastalCard, you can use the cable cars in summer (and PostBus all year) free of charge from your first overnight stay. Something else you might not expect: due to its southerly location, Saas-Fee/Saastal gets over 300 days of sunshine a year. So don't forget your sun cream and sunglasses!



## Leukerbad

The best of nature and culture combine in Leukerbad. The region is known for its thermal spas, once believed to act as a remedy for many ailments; today they are more about relaxation, and provide the perfect way to slow down and take time out from a hectic world. Hot mountain water has been bubbling up to the surface here for millions of years. The surrounding communities of Albinen, Inden, and Varen offer a window into the past in the form of historic wooden buildings, ancient churches, and wine-making heritage – a tradition made possible thanks to the region's extensive sunshine. And Leukerbad is, of course, surrounded by a wonderland of mountains and forests that just begs to be explored. With habitat for the bearded vulture, as well as incredibly diverse ecosystems and cultural landscapes from vineyards all the way up to glacier and bare mountain peaks, this nature park in Central Valais is unusually distinctive – even by Swiss standards!

## USEFUL LINKS

[visitvalais.ch](http://visitvalais.ch)

[regiondentsdumidi.ch](http://regiondentsdumidi.ch)

[nendaz.ch](http://nendaz.ch)

[veysonnaz.ch](http://veysonnaz.ch)

[leukerbad.ch](http://leukerbad.ch)

[saas-fee.ch](http://saas-fee.ch)

To book your next Valais adventure, see [visitvalais.ch/shop](http://visitvalais.ch/shop)

## Highlights

### GORGE ALPINE / ALPINE CANYON

The Fee Gorge, carved out over millennia by glacial meltwater torrents, connects the villages of Saas-Fee and Saas-Grund. The descent of this gorge, which takes three to four hours, is a highlight adventure in the area.

### WHERE TO EAT

No fewer than 14 different fondues can be sampled at Vieux Chalet. The restaurant is cosy and intimate, with a rustic ambience that enhances the sophistication of the dishes. Besides the fondue, there are other traditional dishes such as raclette or rösti.

### WHERE TO STAY

Described by Architectural Digest as 'A ski lodge of noble comfort', The Capra, a luxury boutique wellness hotel, combines five-star luxury with the warmth and informality of a chalet. And with a restaurant that draws inspiration from the Alpine surroundings, the menu will have something to tempt everyone.

## Highlights

### LEUKERBAD THERME

Europe's largest Alpine thermal spa includes no fewer than ten pools, and has water varying from 28°C to 43°C. It's a family-friendly area, too – children up to the age of eight are admitted free of charge, and there is a 100m-long water slide.

### WHERE TO EAT

Perched on the edge of a cliff just above the Gemmi Pass, and right next to the cable car terminus, the views from this hotel are unbeatable. With a stylish, modern interior and a wealth of activities in easy reach, the Gemmi Lodge caters for the adventurous.

### WHERE TO STAY

Alpenblick boasts a sunny, quiet location near the Leukerbad Therme – and offers daily entry at the thermal spas and the Gemmi cable car. Alpenblick's restaurant offers a grill, regional specialities, and a half-board menu.





FEATURE STORY

# MOUNTAIN PERSPECTIVES

A Journey Through Switzerland's Alpes Vaudoises Region

WORDS: EBBA FORSGREN // PHOTOGRAPHY: GRACE TAYLORSON SMITH PRITCHARD  
LOCATION: VAUD / ALPES VAUDOISES

One particular carriage on one of the trains going into the Vaud region just happened to stop right in front of me on the platform, and it caught my eye. Amongst a line of regular train carriages, this looked like the Hogwarts Express.

**M**ountains are where I feel most at home. I grew up in the Swedish mountains, skiing at a high level until I was 16, when I moved away to the city. Living in nature was my normal and the outdoors was my default. But now, with broader experience and different perspectives, I don't take it for granted.

I still spend every moment I can in the mountains. It's an everyday necessity, like eating and drinking, but one that I take with great pleasure and appreciation. So, when I visit a new mountain area I try to experience everything I can. It's with this sense of excitement that I made my way to the Vaud Alps in Switzerland.

After four hours and five train transfers from the airport I was tired, but as I boarded the Hogwarts Express carriage my mood improved. As I got off at my station in Château-d'Éx, I glanced back at the carriage and read the words 'La Belle Époque' painted on the side. This train ride set the tone for my upcoming three days in this magical region.

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I woke to clear skies. First thing on the agenda was a walk around town, followed by a river crossing to get to a waterfall. Since the next three days were going to be filled with adrenaline, it was nice to get a mellow start to my time in the Vaud Alps.

The itinerary then said canyoning. Gearing up, I realised that this is a great way to feel like your clumsiest (but also most indestructible) self, due to the thick layers of wetsuits and life jackets. In my armour I zip lined my way into a pond of bright turquoise water, jumping off while I was going full speed. It felt like the perfect way to embrace the 'experience everything' ethos of this trip.

From this point on I was hooked. Throwing myself into waterfalls, squeezing myself between rocks, and cruising with the river I travelled down La Sarine until my fingers were pruned and my stomach screamed for dinner.

On the way to the next village, I ate my emergency snacks and put my head against the window to absorb the afternoon sun. I think I dozed off, because all of a sudden we pulled up to our next hotel in Leysin. The wooden interior, the classic Switzerland chalet vibes, and the slight smell of cheese fondue formed a welcoming cocoon after the first somewhat chilly autumn day. I spotted a hot tub on the balcony that I immediately threw myself into, although with less force than my previous zip-line jump – there were other guests, after all.

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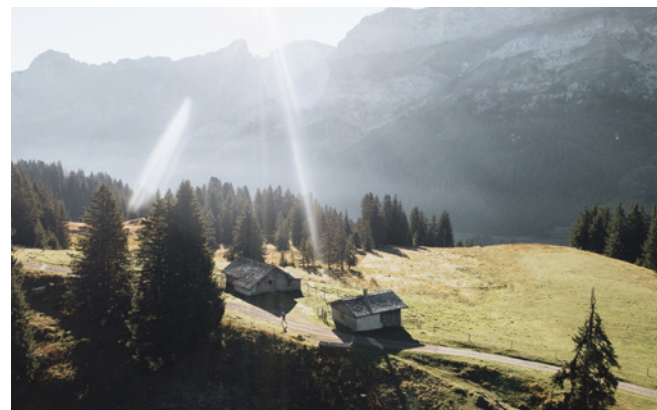
I woke up to another sunny day and another hotel breakfast. With a belly full of Bircher muesli, we headed up into the mountains for a hike. Our crew hiked in silence, accompanied by the sound of four pairs of lungs breathing heavily – and the occasional sigh when someone stopped to take in the views. Oh yes, I thought – I'm back in the mountains where I belong.

Finally we reached the summit, and my first reaction was 'There's the ocean!' But my brain wasn't prepared for the hugeness of Lake Geneva. Euphoria filled my body and mind. It's a feeling that never gets old.

We lunched at Kuklos revolving restaurant, and it is just what it sounds like: a restaurant that revolves 360°. We all had a good laugh, a great lunch, and then it was time to fly. Out of all the experiences in the mountains I love so well, paragliding is something that I feel I have neglected. I had been paragliding before, and







even have a license for it, but it had been five years. Although I wouldn't trust myself with my life after such a gap, I felt very safe hopping into a harness attached to a guide who does this every day.

Paragliding is one of the most thrilling things I know. If I could have a superpower, it would be the ability to fly. So, cruising amongst (and inside!) the clouds, up at the level of the mountains themselves but seeing them from a totally different perspective, we found pillars of warm air and climbed higher and higher before eventually dropping down towards the valley.

My guide asked me, 'Do you wanna go for a little spin?' and I replied: 'Heck yeah, I do!' Here's where the adrenaline came in. He hauled down on one of the handles, leading the parachute to turn. This made us spin – fast. It was like being in a washing machine, hurled about by forces I'm not sure humans are supposed to feel. I laughed hysterically during our whole acrobatic segment. I can't even explain how fun it was, but my stomach didn't agree. The turbo-gliding left me sitting on the ground for a

good 30 minutes after landing, trying to recover and not to throw up. Airsick, still grinning like an idiot, and overwhelmed.

The day wasn't over yet. It was time to come face to face with my worst frenemy: the bike. Growing up in a ski town, I used to do a lot of downhill biking in the summer when the ski slopes turned into a bike park. But after countless wipeouts I sold my bike and saved the slopes for winter. Since then, I've been mountain biking maybe once every year.

Nerve-wracked, Jenny and I hopped on the chair that took us up the mountain. Thank God for her – she made me feel not only safe but like I could do this well. Which is definitely not true, but I hit the trails knowing that she and the team were supporting me. When I'm actually on the bike on the trails, it surprises me how fun this sport actually is every time. At least until I hit a sketchy part of the trail where all my confidence evaporates.

I wish I had the zero-consequence mindset that I'd had when I biked as a kid. Well, actually I don't, because I don't miss those bruises.

I woke at our final hotel in Les Diablerets to the soundtrack of Switzerland: cowbells setting the vibes for another great day. First up on our schedule was trail running, so we headed up to a green lake nice and early. The serene morning run felt like a balm after yesterday's high adrenaline – a reminder that mountains, for me, are all about the variety of everyday adventure.

The run ended at a mountain hut where I had an incredible mushroom pastry for lunch, in between the mandatory Swiss starter and dessert. After a quick nap in the sun, followed by a double espresso, we went to pick up our bikes again. But this time our bikes were equipped with electric batteries. Some say that e-biking is cheating – I say this invention is God's gift to humanity. On our half-a-horse-power vehicles we quickly reached the base of some amazing mountains, and there we rolled up and down on trails, squeezing every gram of enjoyment out of the day.

Everything I experienced in the Vaud Alps made me reflect on my life in the mountains and the unique perspective I've gained along the way.

Until I left the mountains at 16, I couldn't see how special it is to be amongst them. Now, living in the mountains once more, I will never take them for granted again. That makes every day I can spend in the high places special.

These three days were no exception. I came on this trip with few expectations. I didn't even realise what canyoning was and I had never been to Vaud before. Sometimes I think that's the best way to experience something – you just get thrown into situations, you are forced to adapt, and it can be a hit or it can be a miss. I think you can guess which applied today.

With a belly filled with cheese I hopped on the train back to the airport. Sadly, I didn't get to ride in my special 'La Belle Epoque' carriage again, but that's OK. The post-adventure feeling – the best possible version of fatigue – is so much better. Thank you, Alpes vaudoises, for giving me three new days in the mountains and the canyons that I will never take for granted.

@ebbaforsgren // grace.t.s.p





# Outdoor Escapism

DESTINATION GUIDE: VAUD / ALPES VAUDOISES

Whether a vineyard or via ferrata is your go-to, the Alpes vaudoises have a little something for you. Even better, this tucked-away world is all within grasp of Geneva Airport.

WORDS: MEGAN BROWNRIGG  
PHOTOGRAPHY: GRACE TAYLORSON SMITH PRITCHARD

## Highlights

### LES DIABLERETS

Les Diablerets is a true spot to simulate time travel. Tracing the banks of the River Grande-Eau is an ageless pilgrimage in itself, but we also recommend heading towards Vers-l'Eglise just 3km away. This rural hideaway has a quirky history, including a chapel that was built in 1396 before being converted to a temple in 1530.

For anyone craving snowflakes no matter the time of year, Glacier 3000 is a must-visit. The 107m-long Peak Walk by Tissot bridge is the only suspension bridge in the world that connects two mountain peaks, but it offers a view to so many iconic silhouettes, the Matterhorn, Mont Blanc, and Eiger among them.

### WHERE TO EAT

After climbing or hiking the Miroir d'Argentine, it's a must to visit Le Refuge de Solalex at its foot for lunch or dinner. Chef Martin and his team welcome hungry mountaineers in this rustic cabin.

### WHERE TO STAY

Located just across from the Villars train station and with unlimited views over the Rhône Valley to the other side, Alpe Fleurie Hotel & Residence supports both eco-friendly travelling and the enjoyment of nature.

**T**he Alpes vaudoises really lucked out in the game of geography. The region is part of the Canton de Vaud and is a stone's throw from Montreux, on the shoreline of Lake Geneva and at the foot of the Alps, Martigny, and Gstaad. The downside? There's so much to do inside of the region's realms that you might not get to half of it.

If walking is your meditation, 1,000km of marked trails in the Alpes vaudoises are ready to ease your mind and give your legs the 'good ache'. For a sharper injection of discovery, there are via ferrata, pendulum jumps, mountain biking, rafting, and paragliding. And if your bones are in need of a rest, thermal centres with PhDs in pampering abound in this place.

Thanks to a dedication to traditional gastronomy and craftsmanship, the food scene is strong here. Beer, cheese, chocolate, wine, and bread making are just some of the artisan efforts your tastebuds can try for size in the Alpes vaudoises.

It's already a lot to digest, but the Alpes vaudoises region can be best absorbed through its network of some beautiful and welcoming resorts such as Villars, Leysin, Les Diablerets, and Château-d'Ex.

## Villars-sur-Ollon

At 1,300m, this Swiss village looks out onto the Mont Blanc Massif, the Dents du Midi, and even as far as Lake Geneva. But Villars maintains an unaffected charm with its affection for Nordic walking, traditional markets, and toasty thermal springs.

The village boasts 300km of signposted footpaths and 150km of mountain bike routes. Home to the Climbing World Cup, there are plenty of rock faces to scale in the region, plus a via ferrata. And for anyone craving snowflakes no matter the time of year, Glacier 3000 is easily accessible from Les Diablerets, especially during the winter season.



## PHOTOS

01: A river hike in Château-d'Œx

02: Paragliding above Leysin

03: Mountain biking in Les Diablerets

04: The peaks of Leysin

©Grace Taylorson Smith Pritchard



## Highlights

### KUKLOS

At the top of the Berneuse mountain, the Kuklos revolving restaurant completes one turn every hour and a half, offering views of Lake Geneva, the Jura mountain range, and the Rhône Valley – all while enjoying great food.

### WHERE TO EAT

Built in the 1700s, La Fromagerie is one of the most picturesque buildings in Leysin and is both a restaurant and a museum. Before you taste some of the delicious dishes, experience how the cheese is made on site.

### WHERE TO STAY

Sometimes a bunk bed is more luxurious than a five-star resort. In the rustic mountain hut Monts Chevreuils, at 1,700m, you can find out why. Waking up with a panoramic view across the Pays-d'Enhaut is priceless.

## Leysin

Once a famous health resort, you can see why doctors have historically considered Leysin a destination medicine. The area's recipe is simple: south-facing sunshine, mountain oxygen, and a slow pace of living. Difficult things to find these days, but in Leysin they remain the way of life.

250km of hiking trails are the best way to acquaint yourself with the quiet contours of Leysin. Tour d'Œx, the area's highest mountain at 2,331m, acts as a great north star for any routes you're planning. Leysin's bike park, meanwhile, is raring to give you that giddy skip in your tummy. There's a 700m drop for those who want to get right to it, and road bikers will also find their haven in Leysin.

There are also two via ferratas – The Tour d'Œx via ferrata and the Plan Praz via ferrata, located just above the village which is extremely technical with several overhanging sections to navigate.

Leysin has a lesser-known secret. It's home to the highest concentration of caves and holes in all of Switzerland. For fans of the underground, we recommended the tours of the Gouffre du Chevrier, the Aven Artère, and the Grotte de la Cathédrale.

## USEFUL LINKS

[aigle-leysin-lesmosses.ch](http://aigle-leysin-lesmosses.ch)

[villars-diablerets.ch](http://villars-diablerets.ch)

[chateau-doex.ch](http://chateau-doex.ch)

## Highlights

### DECOUPAGE

One of Château-d'Œx's most delicate traditions is the art of paper cutting, otherwise known as silhouette cutting or decoupage. Iterations of this preserved paper art can be seen in the Pays d'Enhaut museum, and the area still boasts plenty of practising artists taking it in new directions. The craft itself was inspired by mountain folklore, so it's worth taking time to read the stories the shapes are telling in their lace-like scenes.

### WHERE TO EAT

What an example of how to blend tradition with modern influences: Sophie Labarraque, a former decorator who worked in the fashion world, took over this Maison d'Hôtes Ermitage, and completely remodelled it. Now there's a tearoom, a coffee corner, a wine bar, a large terrace, and of course, an exhibition space.

### WHERE TO STAY

Located in the heart of the charming village and only three minutes away from the train station, the Hôtel de Ville in Château-d'Œx is the perfect choice for a relaxed stay. As the mountains are so close, all outdoor activities such as hiking, climbing, trail running, or biking start pretty much at your doorstep.

## Château-d'Œx - Pays-d'Enhaut

History and hot-air balloons, village folklore and Alpine dens, Château-d'Œx is nestled between gorgeous contrasts. Geographically, it's set between the Bernese Oberland resort of Gstaad and the town of Gruyères in Canton Fribourg, at the heart of the Alpes vaudoises. Mountain bikers will be thrilled by the trails along the tracks of the 1997 World Championships, whilst walkers and trail runners will be occupied by 300km of trails, including the reserve of La Pierreuse in the foothills of the Alps. This is the largest nature conservation area in western Switzerland.

Water babies need look no further than Château-d'Œx and the powerful pull of the Sarine River. Whitewater sports that you can enjoy here include river rafting, canoeing, kayaking, canyoning, and hydrospeed (also known as riverboarding). And you can't really leave Château-d'Œx without getting in a hot-air balloon. This is the spot where, in 1999, Bertrand Piccard and Brian Jones began their non-stop circumnavigation of the Earth in a balloon, and ever since it's been a nerve centre for passenger flights. And if you're visiting in January, you can watch the sky fill with colour during the international hot-air balloon festival.



# SWISSTAINABLE

## Sustainable Travel in Switzerland

Untouched nature touches our hearts. As a travel destination, Switzerland is synonymous with spectacular mountains, wild gorges and mystical forests; our nature has the power to provide energy. We aim to preserve this – for many generations to come.

