

Summer brakes

From hurtling down a snowless ski run on an e-bike to cooking raclette on an open fire, **Clare Vooght** swaps winter for warm weather in Switzerland's Valais region

I'm pedalling an e-bike up what would, in winter, be a red ski run, just outside Nendaz in the snow-free 4 Vallées ski resort area. To my right, there's a grassy mountainside and to my left, breathtaking views of jagged mountain peaks grazed by a few fluffy clouds – then a sheer drop down.

I'm thankful we're here with knowledgeable mountain guide Romain, who's leading us on a day's excursion, offering a heads-up when we encounter a particularly steep path. On the downhills we must shift our weight backwards over the saddle to stay upright. Next comes a particularly steep incline. "Local kids call this the death trail," says Romain with a chuckle, as he instructs us to drop gears, raise our saddles and power up in 'turbo' mode.

Needless to say, e-biking in the Swiss mountains – even with the power pack doing some of the heavy lifting – is a tough-yet-exhilarating workout that's certainly not for the faint-hearted. However, the rewards are gorgeous vistas across this part of the Valais region – tree-clad mountainsides, grassy

swathes of green dotted with Alpine cows and summer cabins, spiky peaks with just a hint of snow and, I would argue, a licence to eat as much of the local cheese-based dishes as you want afterwards.

With the growing appetite for active breaks, along with warmer winter temperatures affecting snow levels, spring, summer and autumn are starting to garner more attention. And Valais is one of several Swiss regions making the most of the uptick in interest with a mix of activities to enjoy outside the ski season.

SEASONAL SIGHTINGS

Nearing the village of Verrey – little more than a clutch of traditional wooden buildings – we spot a marmot. She spots us too, hunkering down beside a rock and peering out at us from her hiding place. It's a moment you'd miss during winter, when these animals would be hibernating.

From May onwards, clients can see wildflower-sprinkled meadows, while in September, trees are just beginning to turn golden. It's the ideal climate for ➤

E-biking in the Nendaz region of Switzerland

PICTURE: Inghams/E-BikeWorldTour/Kifca

DESTINATIONS

SHORT BREAKS | SWITZERLAND



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Hiking in the Nendaz region; Hôtel Nendaz 4 Vallées & Spa; Nendaz; rustic dish raclette (inset)

PICTURES: Inghams/Etienne Bomet, Hôtel Nendaz 4 Vallées; Nuno Acacio



active pursuits – and given we're here off-season, there are few other visitors.

As well as e-biking, it's a wonderful place to hike. The Swiss Travel Pass includes buses in the region (as well as train travel from Geneva and Zurich airports), so clients can easily reach a variety of starting points across a network of mountain trails. Veysonnaz, a short bus ride from Nendaz, even has a yoga path through the forest, where you can follow a trail with a yoga mat and try the different poses signposted at each stopping point.

SELLING TIPS



Evelyn Lafone
head of trade UK and Ireland,
Switzerland Tourism

"Switzerland is a year-round destination for outdoor sports,

walking and hiking trips, biking, wine tours and nature.

"The winter season ends in mid-April. Les Celliers de Sion will welcome clients for wine tourism all year long, but the guided walk along the traditional bisces and the raclette experience, for six or more people, start in May.

"In autumn, the weather is still nice, the colours are stunning and guests can enjoy outdoor activities and wine tours, and visit the cities for a day of culture.

"For the trade, we offer a sales guide to Switzerland (free with this week's copy of *Travel Weekly*), which highlights many of these experiences, along with our new 30-minute training videos, or 'Swisscasts'."

The region is also known for its eight bisces (irrigation channels), originally created in the 14th century to carry water to the mountain region and now making up around 60 miles of popular mountain trails. We spend a day hiking along Bisse de Vex and Bisse Vieux – following a flat route along rocky paths and wooden decking, passing by waterfalls and through thick forest, the trees periodically giving way to panoramic valley views.

The high point of the day, though, is our evening hike to the Alpage Tortin with mountain guide Anita. We hear the cows' bells before we see hundreds of them returning from a day's grazing – the region's version of rush hour – and continue to a quiet circle of rocks by a mountain path, where Anita lights a fire to make us some *raclette*. This rustic dinner of bread with molten cheese is a welcome end to a day's hike.

VALAIS VINES

The wine in Valais is just as wonderful a reward – and getting down the mountain by public bus to Sion, the canton's capital, for a tasting at Les Celliers de Sion 'wine park' is quick and simple. We're picked up at Sion station by a handy 'wine bus' laid on by the cellar, which takes us to see the vineyards, before we get to try a variety of delicious wines that are rarely exported outside Switzerland.

They call it 'heroic winemaking' here, because the terraces are so steep it's like mountain climbing. Suddenly, my mind flashes back to our heroic uphill pedalling two days earlier – I've never felt like I've earned a wine-and-cheese platter more in my life. **TW**



LOCAL DISHES

Assiette Valaisanne: This platter features raclette cheese, rye bread and several kinds of charcuterie.

Tomato fondue: A classic fondue recipe but with tomato sauce in the mix, typical of the Valais region. Served with potatoes and cornichons for dipping.

Croûte au fromage: As hearty as mountain food gets, this garlicky, white-wine-spritzed grilled sandwich is topped with ham, gut-busting quantities of melted cheese and a fried egg.

BOOK IT

Inghams offers seven nights' half-board at Hôtel Nendaz 4 Vallées from £1,389 per person, based on two sharing. Includes transfers and flights from Heathrow with Swiss, departing September 13, 2025. ingham.co.uk

Swiss offers flights to Geneva from £54 one-way. swiss.com

A **Swiss Travel Pass**, covering all public transport and access to 500-plus museums, costs from £229 for a three-day ticket. travelswitzerland.com

One night's B&B starts from £88 at **Hotel Chalet Royal** in Veysonnaz and £198 at **Mad Mount Hotel** in Nendaz. chaletroyal.ch madmount.ch

Switzerland Tourism's trade team can help agents can find out more about how to book hotels and activities listed in this feature. switzerland.com/trade-uk