

Skiing sustainably

With sustainability a high priority on Swiss slopes, *Stu Parish* explores the green side of classic mountain resort Grindelwald

At last year's *Travel Weekly* VIP ski trip with Hotelplan & Inghams, we held a round table about sustainability, so it felt only right that as we embarked on the 2023 trip that we'd be taking some of those views on board. And with Switzerland Tourism a key part of this year's trip, we weren't just talking about being sustainable – being "Swisustainable" was very much the theme of the trip.

So rather than boarding a coach transfer at Zurich airport, we found our way onto the platform to catch our train to Grindelwald. In Switzerland much of the rail network is electrified and runs on renewable energy such as hydroelectric, and comfortable trains give you the opportunity to sit back and take in the scenery.

With more than 3,000 miles of railway network around Switzerland, it's one of the best-connected countries in Europe (if not the world) and the country's main ski resorts

are easily accessible by train. The trip from the airport lasted just shy of three hours, but with buffet cars (and toilets) at our convenience, the perils of long ski coach transfers were avoided. The final leg took us past the revamped Grindelwald Terminal and up to the main town of Grindelwald, where the line ended. Our hotel was conveniently positioned, so we could begin the adventure soon after our arrival.

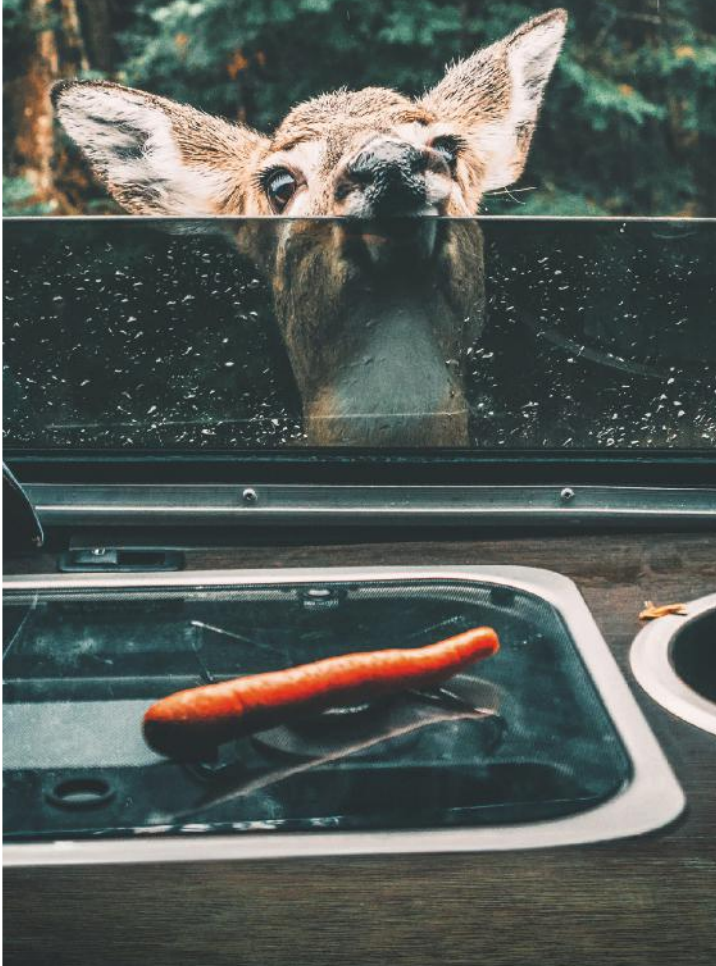
TOP-TIER SKIING

Grindelwald forms part of the Jungfrau region of Switzerland and is overlooked by the imposing peaks of the Eiger, Monch and Jungfrau. It is known for 'Jungfrauoch – Top of Europe', which at 3,454m is the continent's highest railway station, accessed by a 4.3-mile tunnel through both the Eiger and Monch mountains. The train trip offers opportunities en route to take in the scenery, while at the end of the line you can disembark and have a choice of restaurants, incredible views and ice caves to visit. ➤

Grindelwald village

PICTURE: Aaron Chen/52

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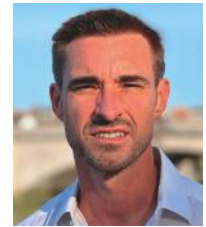
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ASK THE
experts



Craig Burton,
chief executive,
Active Travel Group

"Grindelwald is an iconic destination for mountain lovers, overlooked by the mighty north face of the infamous Eiger. It's a favourite with Ski Solutions clients who put a premium on grand mountain scenery and off-slope activities. The characterful town and the chance to stand on the Jungfrauoch, the self-styled 'Top of Europe', sets Grindelwald apart."



Richard Sinclair,
group chief executive,
Sno Group

"Grindelwald is as glamorous now as when Clint Eastwood and Telly Savalas filmed here. It's the quintessential Swiss chocolate-box alpine village, updated with modern and Swiss-efficient lift infrastructure and with miles of long blues and cruise gentle reds to flatter your technique. The best place to ski and après like 007, Grindelwald remains an old-school class act."

Before and during the pandemic, Grindelwald invested heavily in new infrastructure for its ski terminal, and it now has one of the most modern and sustainable ski terminals in Europe. The project cost about £400 million, consisting of a V-cableway (which runs on hydroelectric power) with the choice of the Mannlichen line or the Eiger Express. The latter takes you 2,333 metres up to a plethora of red and blue ski runs in 15 minutes.

From Eigergletscher you can ski down into Grindelwald without leaving a blue run, making it one of the more accessible pistes I've had the joy of skiing on.

As part of the development of the V-Cableway in Grindelwald, Jungfrau Holding will contribute to a sustainability fund supporting projects in Grindelwald and Lauterbrunnen worth about £179,000 per year for 10 years from 2021. These projects include renovations of

buildings, botanical walks and replacing public water sources.

Outside of skiing Grindelwald has much more to offer in the winter season, albeit predominantly for thrillseekers and those with a serious head for heights. The First Cliff Walk involves a steel walkway around the rockface, which culminates in a 45-metre-long footbridge out over a sheer drop, while the First Flyer and First Glider offer paragliding and zipline thrills for those looking to get down the mountain a bit quicker.

SWISS ROMANCE

Romantik Hotel Schweizerhof is a traditional chalet-style building with wood cladding, shutters and balconies, while the interior is more modern, without losing the property's 'made in Switzerland' vibe. The main property has single and double rooms, and junior suites, while the Grand Chalet to the rear of the building offers suites and deluxe suites for up to

DESTINATIONS

SWITZERLAND | SKI & SNOW



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: First Glider 'eagle' zipline; Jungfrauoch ski resort; Romantik Hotel Schweizerhof

PICTURES: David Birri/JungfrauBahn; Switzerland Tourism/Sebastien Staub

eight people. The Grand Chalet is accessible from the main building, courtesy of a horizontal lift.

Sustainable efforts at the hotel include reducing plastic and using locally sourced produce in the kitchens. Plus, its location is fantastic – just a couple of minutes' walk to the train terminal, which takes you out of town and to the ski terminal building in no time at all. The trains are frequent and easy to get on and off with ski equipment.

RELAXED APRÈS

Having sampled the après-ski of Austria and France in recent years, the Swiss style of celebrating a day on the slopes was far more calm, but perhaps that was reflective of the reduced numbers late in the season.

The E-Tron Energy Bar at the Grindelwald Terminal offers a

convenient stop-off after a day of skiing. It's not your traditional après-bar, but it is modern, with outdoor seating ideal for enjoying the last of the sun, while also being handily close to the train back to Grindelwald.

In the town itself you can find some livelier bars: both the Avocado Bar and Espresso-Bar on the main street offer DJs and live music into the evenings. For something a little more refined and some traditional Swiss cuisine, the 180-year-old Hotel Restaurant Pinte is a 10-minute walk from the hotel. While indulging in Swiss cuisine and après-ski every night might not be sustainable for our waistlines, Grindelwald certainly impressed with the sustainable infrastructure in place for skiers – not to mention all the other trappings you'd expect of a world-class ski town. We'll raise a glass to that. **TW**

BOOK IT

Inghams has seven nights at Romantik Hotel Schweizerhof, on a half-board basis, from £1,539 per person, based on two adults sharing. Includes rail transfers and flight from Gatwick on February 24, 2024. ingham.co.uk

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