

Switzerland Blooms With Natural Wonders

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Swiss mountainside. Seeing is believing.

Spring is in the air in Switzerland, and there is no better time to explore the country's wealth of natural delights.

If you're lucky enough to be walking through one of Switzerland's nature parks this time of year, you could be forgiven for getting carried away by spring fever and humming a tune from the iconic film, *The Sound of Music*. The hills are definitely alive here, brimming with postcard-perfect vistas of wildflowers blooming on rolling green hills, and crystal-clear lakes reflecting snow-capped mountains that jut towards the sky. And the best part is, this isn't Hollywood magic, it's natural Switzerland in full flower.

Whether you're "taking the waters" on a Kneipping trail in the Binn Valley or discovering a world of ice, rocks and forest in the Jungfrau-Aletsch Region, springtime in Switzerland is the ideal setting for unexpected adventures with a decided *Suisse* twist.

SWISS GEM: THE BINN VALLEY

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Located in the Goms in the Upper Valais region, the Binntal (Binn Valley) is an unspoiled paradise, famous for its wealth of mineral deposits. Over 160 varieties of crystal are found in this nature reserve, which may explain why smugglers used these same trails on their way to Italy long ago. Hike along the geological trail in Lengenbach to learn more about the various rocks and minerals found in the region. Children love searching the dolomite rock for fool's gold (pyrite). Check with the [Binntal Tourist Office](#), which organizes guided tours of the Lengenbach mine once a week, which is usually not open to the public. Also renowned for its scenery, tulips and gastronomy, the Binntal is one of Switzerland's best-kept secrets. Another of its gems include authentic, award-winning Alpine villages, which transport you back in time. One such hamlet, Grenchols, is home to a tulip found only here, which blooms in a field above the village. More than 3,500 of them flower in May.



Swiss herb garden in bloom

Kneipping in Blitzengen is an adventure of a different sort that awaits here in the region. Sure, it's a mouthful, but it gets you outside and has been a healthful pursuit of locals for centuries. It involves hiking, but you can forget your boots on the Kneipp trail here. By way of background, Kneipp is a form of naturopathic medicine founded by a German priest in the 19th century. Besides physical activity, it involves hydrotherapy and other treatments and is popular in Swiss spas. Blitzengen just happens to be home to the longest Kneipp trail in Switzerland, where you'll be instructed to remove your socks and shoes and walk barefoot across the soft moor grounds. Signs are posted at various stations along the trail, suggesting health activities, like walking through freezing cold water! So rather than paying pricey spa rates, you get all the benefits while experiencing the treatment *gratis* while you enjoy the scenic trails of the Binntal. (Footnote: It is claimed that hydrotherapy strengthens the whole body, increasing resistance to colds and infections).

Since herbal therapy is also a part of Kneipping, dig into a fresh herb salad at the fabulous [Hotel Castle](#) in Blitzengen. Peter Gschwendtner, chef and owner of the hotel, is a master of gastronomic delights, as well as an avid mountaineer. Inspired by nature, Gschwendtner creates culinary perfection using local produce from his own backyard. Rooms at the all-suites hotel are spacious, with outstanding views overlooking the Goms Valley.



Switzerland's imposing Aletsch Glacier

JUNGFRAU-ALETSCHE REGION

The Aletsch Glacier, located in the eastern Bernese Alps in Valais, is the largest (and most impressive) glacier in the Alps, with a length of 23 km. If you're up for hiking for several hours, you can get up close and step onto the glacier itself. Take the cable car from Fiesch to Eggishorn for an amazing view. If your knees are in good shape, you can descend to Märjelsee Lake. From there, it's just a short hike to the glacier. A less strenuous option is to take the cable car halfway back to Fiescheralp and hike the road to the lake through the tunnel, then down to the glacier.

LAKE GENEVA REGION

High above Lake Geneva, thousands of ripening grapes cling to the steeply terraced hillsides, providing a picturesque backdrop for wine lovers and cyclists alike. **The Lavaux** (a UNESCO heritage site) is Switzerland's largest wine producing area. Swiss wine is rare for a simple reason—the Swiss drink almost all the wine they produce. For an enjoyable wine touring experience, hop aboard the "Train des Vignes" from Vevey, which takes you up past the vineyards of Lavaux, before winding its way down to Puidoux-Chexbres. Another sight not to be missed in the Montreux-Vevey area is the historic **Chateau de Chillon**, an architectural jewel on the shores of Lake Geneva. The self-guided tour is an excellent overview of the castle's 1,000-year history.



Lake Geneva's Historic Chateau de Chillon

JURASSIC PARK OF VAUD

Near the French border, ranging from the medieval town of Romainmôtier to the summit of La Dôle, the Parc Jurassien Vaudois (Jura Park) provides a network of easy trails through blooming meadows and lush forests, leaving you an enviable choice of perfect picnic spots. Jagged limestone and pastures surrounded by weathered stone walls guide you from one historic village to the next. Alpine cheese dairies and "Buvettes d'Alpage" (Alpine huts) found along the trails offer refreshments and local specialties. Stop in at the Chalet d'alpage du Mont Tendre (Tel. +41 (0)76 566 11 47) and try Alpine Gruyère AOC or the very special Vacherin Mont d'Or — a soft, rich seasonal cheese, available from mid-September through early May.

Of course, what would a trip to Switzerland be without fondue? Dip into a hot, bubbling pot of melted cheese at [Restaurant d'Alpage La Breguette](#), south of the Dent de Vaulion. At 1,080-meters of elevation with inspiring views of the Lac de Joux, you can enjoy regional specialties, such as beef steaks, snails and wild mushroom-filled dumplings, expertly prepared by Philippe Guignard.

For a peaceful stay in Le Sentier, check into the [Hotel Bellevue Le Rocheray](#), located on the banks of Lac de Joux, the Jura Mountains' largest lake. Visit the Audemars Piguet Museum in Le Brassus (a neighboring town) and see where the famous Swiss watches were born over 250 years ago. And don't miss a sumptuous dinner at [Hotel des Horlogers](#), one of the most renown restaurants in the area.



Switzerland's icy icon, The Matterhorn

ZERMATT

The Matterhorn, one of the most iconic landmarks in the world, sits grandly, towering over the idyllic village of Zermatt, a popular ski resort attracting tourists and mountaineers from all over the world. Zermatt is pedestrian-friendly and the air is crisp and clean, thanks to being car-free since 1947. A bounty of shops and world-class restaurants abound, but the real attraction here is the big "M."

To view the Matterhorn from its most photogenic side, take the cog railway up the mountain to the Gornergrat (3,089 meters). A magnificent panorama awaits you at the summit with spectacular views of the Matterhorn, surrounded by 38 peaks of over 4,000 meters!

A choice address in Zermatt is the [Mountain Paradise Hotel](#), which is conveniently located close to the Matterhorn Glacier Paradise cable car station.

It's easy to feel you're on top of the world when you take the Glacier Paradise to the Klein Matterhorn ("Little Matterhorn"). At 3,883 meters, Europe's highest viewpoint offers another awe-inspiring panorama of the majestic mountains of the Italian border. You can even ski over to Italy for lunch, without a passport. Ambitious hikers can hire a guide for a few hours and ascend the Breithorn, a 4,000-meter mountain.

Open 365 days a year, the ski area is the highest in the Alps and one of the most developed in the world. Nevertheless, the weather is near perfect in Zermatt—sunshine 300 days a year, with less rainfall than anywhere else in Switzerland. You gotta love a place where you can even ski in the summer. We call that a peak experience.

How to Get There

[SWISS International Airlines](#)

(Once you're there, it's easy to get around Switzerland, which boasts one of the [best public transportation systems in the world](#)).

Where to Stay

[Hotel Castle](#) (Blitzengen)

[Mountain Paradise](#) (Zermatt)

[More Info on Switzerland](#)

See our slideshow below for more images of Switzerland (all images: Liz Laing)



Swiss Mountainside

SHIPLEYVIEWER