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<http://www.express.co.uk/travel/articles/860677/Verbier-Switzerland-Alpine-ski-resort-winter-sports>

Verbier: Take a brisk saddle at the world-famous Swiss Alpine ski resort

CHARGING downhill along a twisty, stony track, stealing furtive glances at the snow-capped peaks which appear almost at eye level in the distance, I can't help thinking we must be the world's slowest mountain bikers.

By [JULIA HORTON](#)

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Verbier is an Alpine village in Switzerland's Valais Canton

As a fan of cycling on slightly less steep terrain, like Norfolk for instance, I'm apprehensive at first about getting in the saddle in Verbier, the world-famous Swiss Alpine ski resort.

But our bicycles are all electric, which makes them a great way to explore at high altitude with minimal effort. Beyond the snow season, Verbier is a green oasis accessible to all, as it emerges from the white blanket of powder which has transformed this once remote rural farming region into one of the most renowned winter playgrounds of the rich and famous.

And now activities are even easier to reach thanks to a new pass called Verbier Infinite Playground (or VIP for short, in keeping with the resort's glitzy winter image) – a tourist card giving visitors free travel on cable cars and local buses and discounts on pursuits like mountain biking. Numerous ski and snowboarding runs, access paths for farmers and high altitude restaurants criss-cross the meadows, providing more than 500 miles of cycling trails, with a mix of gradients from seriously steep to totally flat.

After a cautious start on our first venture downwards, at around 6,500ft, the gradient and rough stones smooth out and I relax to drink in the spectacular scenery.

We pass a herd of glossy black Hérens cows, their bells clanging unmistakably as they graze the lush alpine meadows.

They produce milk for the area's globally renowned cheeses, which are delicious as I discover on a visit to a factory shop back down in the town at award-winning cheesemaker Laiterie de Verbier.

It is open when we drop in but we still can't resist the chance to try the cheese vending machine outside the factory, loaded solely with tasty half or quarter wheels of raclette and bags of "DIY" fondue to which you just add white wine. During a factory tour we are served samples of cheese and see the cellar where maturing wheels of raclette, each about the size of a car tyre, are stacked from floor to ceiling on shelves.

The next day we're up early and back on our bikes from our base at the Hotel Bristol.



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Cherries Walks in Switzerland

The gradient and rough stones smooth out and I relax to drink in the spectacular scenery

Julia Horton

Luckily they are dual-powered so I switch off the juice and pedal under my own steam to the Verbier 3D Sculpture Park, where works by international artists are exhibited outside over a wide path between Les Ruinettes and La Chaux.

Highlights include a 12ft high red, white-and-black bird dubbed the Pregnant Pelican and billboard-size images of skiers standing in line, backs to camera, sporting underwear daubed with letters spelling out the message "save the climate".

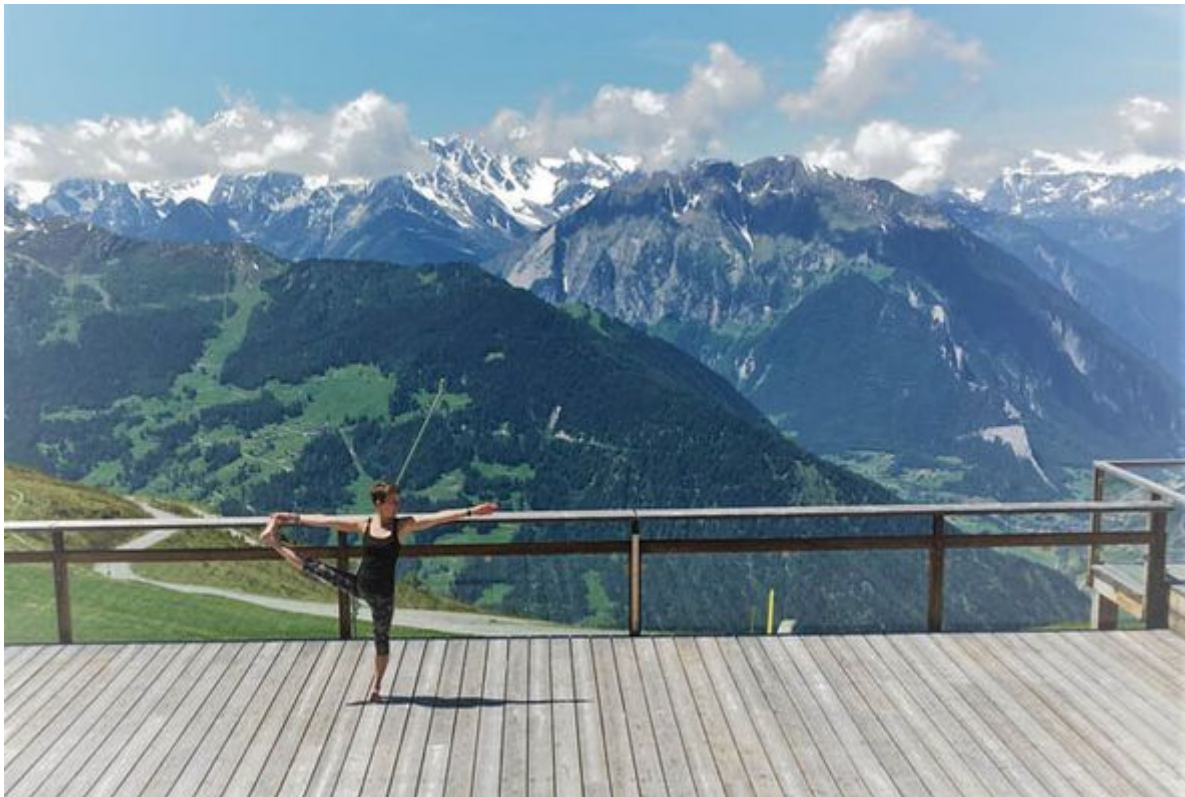
At the end of the exhibition we find a wooden sign spelling out “Verbier” in metre-high letters just below the La Croix-de-Coeur restaurant (at the Col de la Croix de Coeur), where we stop for lunch, serves impressive artistically presented local specialities, including dried meats, alongside yet more spectacular views.

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The delicious three-course lunch includes traditional roasted apricots decorated with sprigs of rosemary.



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Mountain yoga with a beautiful view

Up in the mountains it's all about the views and I'm off to try out something completely different.

We take the cable car to Savoleyres, at around 7,500ft and stroll to a wooden platform in the middle of a slope. On the far side of the valley snow-capped peaks rise, while the rooftops of Verbier are below.

This is where I'm about to try mountain yoga – and what a location it turns out to be.

Moving through different poses, I hear the tweet of birds and the buzz of insects also enjoying the warm rays of the mid-afternoon sun.

It feels a little surreal, particularly when our instructor, Kirstin, tells us to twist and “face the chairlift”.



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Prices include accomodation at the Hotel Bristol

It's a good way to work up a fresh appetite, and back down in Verbier we enjoy a four-course dinner on the terrace of Le Chalet d'Adrien looking out over the valley. With Verbier's close proximity to Italy, it's not surprising that many dishes originate from there so I enjoy a rich risotto with chanterelle mushrooms.

Verbier is inviting any time of year, with its pretty wooden chalets and endless bars and restaurants. The chefs must be inspired here, I thought, as I set out on a foraging hike one morning.

Travelling by cable car to the neighbouring resort of La Tzoumaz, we meet our guide, nicknamed Cherries, and spend a couple of hours walking through meadows and woodland to find lunch, as Cherries excitedly explains how to pick and cook a feast.

She says: “We will gather stinging nettles for pesto and clover and daisies for salads.”

I don't get stung and our efforts are not just edible but pretty good.

Meanwhile, for the best view of all with the least effort, we take a final cable car trip to Mont Fort, Verbier's highest peak, where the jagged giants jostling for space on the horizon include world-famous Mont Blanc and the Matterhorn.

Beautiful as they are, thankfully we are out of time to climb them.

That said, we'd had a pretty adventurous time and the trip proved that you don't need snow to enjoy the full active-Swiss experience.



Mountain biking in Verbier

THE KNOWLEDGE

Switzerland Travel Centre (0207 420 4934/switzerlandtravelcentre.co.uk) offers seven nights in Verbier from £749, B&B (two sharing).

Price includes accommodation at the Hotel Bristol, return flights from London to Geneva, return rail travel from Geneva to La Chable.

Transfers not included.

Verbier tourism: verbier.ch