

# Travelling to Verbier with my daughter



**Debbie Marshall**

Founder of Silver Travel Advisor

Website: <https://www.silvertraveladvisor.com>

Date published: 29 Jan 21

Inter-generational travel is quite the mode these days, and in 2020 during the all-too-brief summer months when Covid seemed to be under control and borders tentatively reopened, I took the opportunity to travel to the mountains and valleys of the Swiss Alps with my grown-up daughter. Wide open spaces, nature, healthy living and a chance to spend some quality time together after a long lockdown apart. What could be more appealing?



Our visit to experience summer in the Valais region began in Verbier with a foraging expedition, aptly known as the Sentier Des Sens (path of the senses). Our guide, the appropriately (and delightfully) named Cherries was a botanical expert, was thankfully knowledgeable about what to pick, and, more importantly, what we could eat.

With our foraging bags at the ready, we headed up the mountain scrutinising plants and flowers under Cherries' watchful eye. Wild rhubarb, dandelions, spinach, yarrow, camelia, field pansies, bluebells, nettle; we learned how to identify them, how to pick them, and how to select only the tastiest morsels for lunch. Who knew that dandelions should only be eaten before their flowers go fuzzy, or that you can stroke a stinging nettle, caressing the leaves upwards towards the tip, for a pain-free experience? We found hogweed, known as the ginseng of the Alps (plenty of that went in my bag), and edible white thistles too. Eeyore would have been proud.

Our eco-bags filled, we arrived at a chocolate box chalet to separate out the stash, so that Cherries could remove the toxic plants (rookie errors) and we cooked up our lunch, accompanied by a few supermarket purchases of pasta and bread (nutritious as the foraged goods were, we needed a few carbs). The taste of the wild rhubarb dessert eaten hot and 'en plein air' is one that has created a forever Proustian memory.



The foodie theme continuing, our next excursion was to a gathering of the Slow Food Association (that's my kind of food) in the hamlet of Sarreyer. Just 15 minutes' drive from the cosmopolitan centre of Verbier, we stepped

back in time to savour traditional mountain life. Our evening began inside a traditional working watermill which has three important jobs: wood-carving, flour milling and the production of apple juice. Abandoned for over 30 years, it was fully restored in the 1980s and is now classified as a historical monument.

Local Valais farmers appeared with trays of delicacies accompanied by home-grown absinthe and elderflower gin, and certain members of our group took to the tasting session with great enthusiasm. With my notoriously low threshold for alcohol, I sternly checked myself in the interests of good behaviour, and focused on the food instead. It was a truly Swiss experience with cheese and chocolate in abundance, the latter hand-crafted by Switzerland's finest chocolatier, a mere slip of a man who clearly has a very high metabolism.

I was rewarded for my abstinence the next morning with a clear head, as we departed early for our E-biking expedition. Now this was a perfect activity for a mother and daughter to enjoy together. I've never tried e-biking before, and now I know what I have been missing. It's a pure joy to glide effortlessly up the steepest of inclines. You have to do a little bit of pedalling too, but it's all for show really, the motor does all the work, and you can just look cool.



And so much for the younger generation taking the conventional bicycles and putting all that youthful energy into pedal power. They were all on e-bikes too. We meandered through seemingly never-ending lanes, across flower-filled meadows and the sun shone down. It was the stuff of Sound of Music, and I expected a perfect chorus of singing children to emerge at any moment. Our thoughtfully laid out culinary itinerary – La Ronde Gourmande – lived

up to its name providing a pitstop every hour with local produce and drinks for ravenous and exhausted cyclists. If truth be told, we really weren't that tired or hungry at all after stress-free electric pedalling, and had barely burned a calorie, but it would have been rude not to sample the plates laden with local meats and cheeses, breads and pastries, and that was all before lunch!



Our final activity was in many ways the most unexpected and interesting. I'll confess that I've been going to Verbier since the 1980s, but have never stopped to wonder how it came about, and how it evolved into one of the world's premier ski resorts. So it was fascinating to be taken to the Mauvoisin Dam, built after the second world war and, at 250m in height, the 8th largest in the world. It was built to use the water to make electricity for

beleaguered countries after World War II (in which Switzerland was of course not involved), and the proceeds were then used to build the resort of Verbier in the Bagnes Valley which had previously been a poor region with cheese as its only industry.



Then the British arrived in the 1960s, and built hotels, and bringing recreational skiers with their wooden skis and leather boots, and the rest, as they say, is history. The canton is now one of the wealthiest in Switzerland, and the cost of real estate rivals Chelsea.

It was a mesmerising experience to walk through the original construction tunnels, emerging onto the

ridge of the dam wall and marvel at the scale, overlooking the Lac des Dis. And this being Switzerland, a fabulous buffet appeared as if from nowhere, and we were served a marvellous brunch en plein air.

With the effects of the pandemic meaning that this was a somewhat unusual summer, we were not able to experience the full range of activities in Verbier. This would normally have included the PALP festival:



series of events in unusual settings celebrating local culture and heritage, including the fabulously named Electraclette (raclette and DJs) and other events to highlight local produce and music. That will have to be for a future visit.

Little did we know at the time that more lockdowns were to follow, and that this would be our only trip of the summer. Now deep in lockdown, I am still grateful for those few days of natural social distancing in the Alpine meadows, together with my daughter, which fortified us for the long winter ahead.

#### **More information**

Swiss Air offers up to 180 direct flights each week from London airports to Geneva, from as little as £52 one way.

A stay of one night or more in Verbier entitles you to a free Verbier Infinite Playground (VIP) Pass +, your ticket to the lifts that take you up into the peaks or down into the valley, as well as 50 activities for free or at a discounted rate.