



CRANS-MONTANA, SWITZERLAND

There are few places you can relax and settle into while feeling like you are on top of the world. A villa in Crans-Montana, Switzerland will be one of them. Squint hard and you can see Mont Blanc and the Matterhorn – and not the one built from Walt Disney’s imagination. Soften your eyes and you’ll find a 10,000-foot glacier of your own, the Plaine Morte Glacier, and practically in your backyard.

Considered possibly the best place in Switzerland to visit for views, activities and taking in the air that angels breathe, the mountains of Crans-Montana are alive year ‘round with a swell of excitement and, indeed, the sound of music.

Crans-Montana hosts events throughout the year, including the Women’s World Cup downhill in February the massive electronic music fiesta known as the Caprices Festival, in spring; there are Mozart concerts on the golf greens and TED talks in the villages – always something to engage the visitors in these quaint mountain villages.

The more than century-old settlements that were once Crans and Montana are now joined by development but retain the charm of yesteryear in ambient shopping, walking and dining streets and easy connections between the two once separate spots that are only about a mile apart.

Celebrity-spotting is still an option at this rarefied resort. Until his death in 2017, Crans Montana was a favorite wintering spot for James Bond actor, Sir Roger Moore. Crans-Montana is not a package destination although it is accessible to a range of budgets as it is attracting a younger crowd these days.

You don't need a car to get to or get around Crans-Montana. Rather, you can catch a two-hour train from Geneva Airport to Sierre and hop on a funicular that takes you directly to the resort in about 30 minutes.

LOCATION

The twin resorts of Crans and Montana can be found on a sun-drenched plateau high above the Rhone Valley at an altitude of around 5000 feet. Together they form one of Switzerland's top vacation destinations in the Valais practically in the center of the Switzerland. All is lakes, meadows, carpets of wildflowers and soft meadows for grazing sheep. From the chalet are walking trails, lake views, mountain views, easy access to lifts and villages and a dedicated concierge to answer questions and make arrangements.

SKIING IN CRANS-MONTANA

This ski resort is one of two ski resorts in Switzerland with a family-friendly designation, if only because there is a ski mountain for every level of skill and so much available for visitors of every age to enjoy. Etoile Bella Lui, considered a winter festival for families, runs from early December to early January each year when walking paths are illuminated by lanterns. A robust craft market with a Ferris wheel attracts the crowds and ice shows take place on the ice rink in the center of town.

Skiers choose among 61 ski runs covering 87 miles of groomed powdered paths. Experts seeking some added adrenaline kicks can try the Woman's Downhill run -- one of the steepest in Europe with twists, turns and drops through thick stands of pine.

The Switzerland ski resort is divided into four focus areas: the family area, the fun area, the glacier area and the nature area. A run at the Plaine Morte Glacier can be a spectacular experience as it is the highest ski mountain in the system, with a launch at around 8,900 feet, and remains snow packed all year.

The inter-connected Crans-Montana ski area is easy to navigate through a comprehensive system of lifts and gondolas. Skiing Crans-Montana will be easier with a Crans-Montana Ski Pass, available online.

THINGS TO DO IN CRANS-MONTANA

In winter, hikers will want to snowshoe on some of the 43 miles of maintained trails. There are also 54 miles of inviting cross-country ski trails for classic and skating style excursions. Other winter activities include winter activities --

including: torchlight descents, curling, ice skating, air boarding, ice climbing, paintballing, tandem flying, snowbiking, skating, snowscoting, snowkiting, snowtubing and heliskiing.

Those looking to summer in Switzerland can head to Crans-Montana for some of the most stunning bike trails in Switzerland with 33 miles of downhill tracks, a third reserved for bikers. Other summer sports include boating on area lakes, mini-golf, swimming, fishing, and Nordic walking and hiking on the Aletsch glacier.

Golf in Crans-Montana is a serious undertaking. Four quality golf courses, a prestigious club, and the annual Omega European Masters tour, one of the most celebrated tournaments on the continent, attracts golfers from all over the world. Holes are named for legendary fans at the Crans-sur-Sierre greens: Severiano Ballesteros (18 hole) and Jack Nicklaus (9 hole). But every hole features a front and center view of the Alps for spectacularly scenic games.

SHOPPING IN CRANS-MONTANA

Shopping in the Alps becomes a treat with some 120 shops and boutiques lining an open air shopping street called Rue du Prado. Find luxury brands, winter and summer fashions, the latest ski gear, jewelry and what-nots amid quaint chalet-style shops.

RESTAURANTS IN CRANS-MONTANA

At the root – in fact the very ancient roots of Crans-Montana’s story is wine. Grapes were first grown and converted into wine as here as early as 800 BC. This, wine makers in the region know their wine. Swiss wine is not something found in abundance at celebrated restaurants around the world and the fact that it is created in small quantities and rarely exported makes it that much more precious.

Wine tasting can be a rewarding activity in Crans-Montana. Recommended: Fendant wine as an aperitif, possibly followed by a local pinot noir. Crans-Montana is one of Switzerland’s top wine-producing regions. Oenophiles should target the Salon des Vins et Terroir event in March.

Crans-Montana boasts a thriving gastronomy scene with an eclectic mix of local and international themes, and two Michelin-starred restaurants: Franck Reynaud’s L’Ours and Pierre Crepaud’s LeMontblanc.

But in Crans-Montana, cheese is king. Pastries and cakes are often filled with cheese. Raclette is a must-sample, often used for melting but also consumed by the slice. Local desserts include sweet apple pies, although delicious potato pie with served with various sausages are common. Pork is the most

popular meat in area gastronomy. Curious visitors may want to try a dish called “Gsottus” that is a peasant dish in the region using meat preserved in a special way and made into a stew with pears, onions and celery and served as a hearty winter favorite.

AIRPORTS AND TRANSPORTATION IN CRANS-MONTANA

The closest airport to Crans-Montana is Bern Belp Airport (BRN) at around 40 miles away, followed by Geneva Cointrin International Airport (GVA) around 65 miles away; then Lugano Airport (LUG) at 72 miles and finally Zurich Airport (ZRH) at 94 miles away.

From Zurich or Geneva take the mainline train toward Sion or Sierre for a scenic trip along lakes, vineyards and mountains.

GVA Transfers offers a modern fleet of various-size vehicles for quick and comfortable private transfers at various airports. A 24-hour meet and greet service is at the ready, and a welcome amenity as flights change. Drivers speak English and French. Renting a car at the airport is also an option although, be warned, the last 50 miles from Sierre to Crans-Montana is on a winding mountain-road. Also, there are routes from Bern that may require going on a car transporter through the mountain. Also, you may need to purchase a Swiss Motorway road tax vignette.