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Valais at its beautiful best

Enjoy world-class skiing and gasp-inducing scenery.

By Kevin Coyd

Of all the cantons that make up Switzerland, Valais is perhaps the luckiest. It's not just blessed with some of Switzerland's most stunning alpine scenery – it's also home to a constellation of world-class ski areas.

Located about halfway between Chamonix and Zermatt, the twin resorts of Nendaz and Veysonnaz are among the lesser-known gems of the region. Both share a spectacular setting, the same altitude of 4,600ft and an enviable 300 days of sunshine each year, but each has a distinct character. Nendaz is a modern resort built around the old village of Haute-Nendaz in traditional chalet style, while Veysonnaz typifies the timeless rustic charm of Valais.

Then there's the skiing – and whether you're making your first tracks on skis or seeking out terrain that's steep, deep and demanding, you'll be spoilt for choice. Nendaz and Veysonnaz form part of the 4 Vallées, Switzerland's largest ski area and the third-biggest in Europe. All told, there's around 255 miles of marked runs to explore.

The modern lift network makes it easy to explore neighbouring Verbier, one of the world's most famous destinations for snowsports. There are also fast links to Thyon 2000, where you can test your mettle on the legendary Piste de l'Ours that has witnessed the thrills and spills of 30 World Cup races.

Children are well catered for, with "magic carpet" ski lifts for beginners, good-value family ski passes and free use



Winter wonderland: a cable car hovers over Val d'Anniviers

of lifts for the under-sevens. What's more, Nendaz has held the Swiss "Families Welcome" award since 1997.

If you're seeking an alternative to boarding or alpine skiing, there are more than 100 miles of walking and snow-shoeing routes to discover, plus 12 miles of cross-country ski trails. And after an exhilarating day, you can relax aching muscles inside the luxurious Spa les Bisses at the Nendaz 4 Vallées – a new 62-room hotel – or the plush spa and swimming complex at Veysonnaz.

Val d'Anniviers is another ski area that represents the Valais at its unspoilt best. The peaceful 18-mile valley, surrounded by a crown of 13,000ft summits, seems a world away from the crowds.

Its three resorts – St-Luc/Chandolin, Grimontz-Zinal and Vercorin – are places where the old alpine ways of life are still observed. You'll see ancient granaries still standing among the shingle-roofed chalets,

and get acquainted with Valais traditions such as "glacier wine" served straight from the vat.

A single lift pass grants access to more than 100 ski runs across three distinct ski areas. They range from gentle slopes that sweep down through evergreen forests to more challenging terrain. There are 15 descents that offer more than 1,000m in height difference, including the Piste du Chamois – a bracing descent from the highest point in the ski area all the way down to the valley floor. Enlist a guide to venture off-piste and you'll find almost endless freeriding possibilities.

Winter in Val d'Anniviers isn't just about skiing. You can try out tobogganing or escape along the many hiking routes and snow-shoe trails that snake through the valley. And if you'd like a bird's-eye view of the "Imperial Crown" of high peaks, tandem flights are available at two paragliding schools.

Special offers

For a variety of great offers, including five nights' half-board in a hotel in Val d'Anniviers, four days of skiing plus a slab of Swiss chocolate (£389pp, for reservations made before January 31, 2015), go to sierre-anniviers-booking.com

For more information, visit nendaz.ch, veysonnaz.ch and sierre-anniviers.ch

val d'anniviers
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NENDAZ
4 VALLÉES

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