

The spa terrace at the Kameha Grand Zurich is not to be missed

# SWISS APPEAL

*Discover lakeside Zurich or head to the powdery slopes of Gstaad*

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## *Cultural Zurich*

My friend and I were after something a little different, good food, and a helping of cultural inspiration. Enter Kameha Grand Zurich: the Autograph Collection's first hotel in Switzerland, and one that prides itself in being 'exactly like nothing else'. With a Michelin-star restaurant that offers fine dining with mind reader Tobias Heinemann, Kameha fitted the bill perfectly. We couldn't wait to see the collection of themed suites created by the famed Marcel Wanders and experience the stunning spa terrace.

Arriving on a Saturday after a short flight we settled down in the Serenity Suite, a wellness suite complete with yoga mats and a gloriously spacious

bathroom, and preened ourselves ready for dinner. I defy any foodie not to appreciate the six-course offering in the opulent interiors of YOU restaurant. Perfectly paired with Swiss wines, such as a Riesling and a sparkling rose from the Vineyard Obrecht in Graubunden, the menu kept us guessing and led up to a decadent dessert of Valrhona chocolate with rhubarb. After dining, you can cocoon yourself in the shisha lounge.

Early risers should head to the gym and work up an appetite to enjoy the spectacular Sunday brunch before setting off. Zurich also packs quite the cultural punch, and the surrealist movement Dada was founded there 50 years ago this year.

Meandering along the quaint streets, you can transport yourself back to 1916, when the exiled artists gathered in the heart of the notorious Niederdorfl district. Sip a beer at their legendary cafe club Cabaret Voltaire, which is just a few steps from where Lenin lived in exile.

We also visited the Kunsthau, home to a large collection of sculptures by Giacometti, as well as favourites by Picasso and Matisse. Had we more time,



## TRIP NOTES

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we would have checked out the cool 'industriequartier', Zurich West – but it was time for dinner.

We headed for the Paradeplatz and Bahnhofstrasse (a shopaholic's mecca) before dining at restaurant Rive Gauche in the chic setting of the Baur au Lac, a 170-year-old, 5-star hotel overlooking the lake.

As well as being a destination for its famous Christmas markets, culture, food and shopping, Zurich is also suited to wellness fans. Come spring, the lakeside lidos come to life and healthy hikes up the Uetliberg mountain become more appealing. It gets a big tick from us.

**Kameha Grand Zurich offers double rooms from £136 per night. See [kamehagrandzuerich.com](http://kamehagrandzuerich.com)**

Baur au Lac overlooks the lake, and offers casual dining at Rive Gauche as well as Michelin at Pavillon



## Skiing in Gstaad

The word 'Gstaad' resonates. It's where Madonna chooses to ski, after all. Located in Bern, southwest Switzerland, the chic resort is compact enough to feel exclusive but has a diverse offering of ski runs to satisfy all levels. The alpine landscape isn't just pretty, it's also authentic, with some 200 agricultural businesses still in operation and chalet-style homes dominating the villages. But it also has a touch of sparkle, with artisan cheese shops, bars and galleries sitting alongside brands like Prada, Louis Vuitton and Ralph Lauren in the picturesque town centre.

Marks of its authenticity include traditional horse-and-carriage rides on offer from Gstaad to Lauenen (accompanied by the trap's resident Bernese mountain dog, Nico) and husky-sleigh rides in Lauenen Rohr. Where traditional mountain life perhaps gets a little muddled with tourism is at Michel's Stallbeizli fondue restaurant in a working cattle barn. Here you sit right opposite the cows as they feed. Thankfully, the sturdy glass windows shield you from the smell, but not, sadly, the sight of cattle doing, you know, what it does, as you try to enjoy your molten cheese...

It's a popular restaurant, but if the thought fills you with horror, Gstaad's eateries have chalked up a total of 270 GaultMillau points and 3 Michelin stars between them, ranging from cosy raclette stübli to top-end gourmet and cosy mountainside terraces. Take your pick.

In terms of skiing, it's a deceptively large resort with 220 km of slopes between 1,000 and 3,000 metres, the highest point being Wildhorn, 3,247m above sea level, plus the only glacier ski area in the Bernese Oberland. For thrill seekers, there's also the (rather pricey) option of heli-skiing where, after an impressive flight past glaciers and Alpine peaks, you can land at some of the resort's highest points with an experienced mountain guide to help you navigate the best powder-snow slopes.

Gstaad is one of the top cross-country ski areas in the Alps and is also popular with hikers, but the hipsters are into snow biking, where you head up to dedicated tracks to tackle the snow on fat-tired mountain bikes. It's hard work on the uphill, but fun on the downs and the scenery is beautiful. While up on the snow-biking trails of Sparenmoos, we also rediscovered a childhood winter pastime that had us all in stitches – sledging. Carved out around the snow



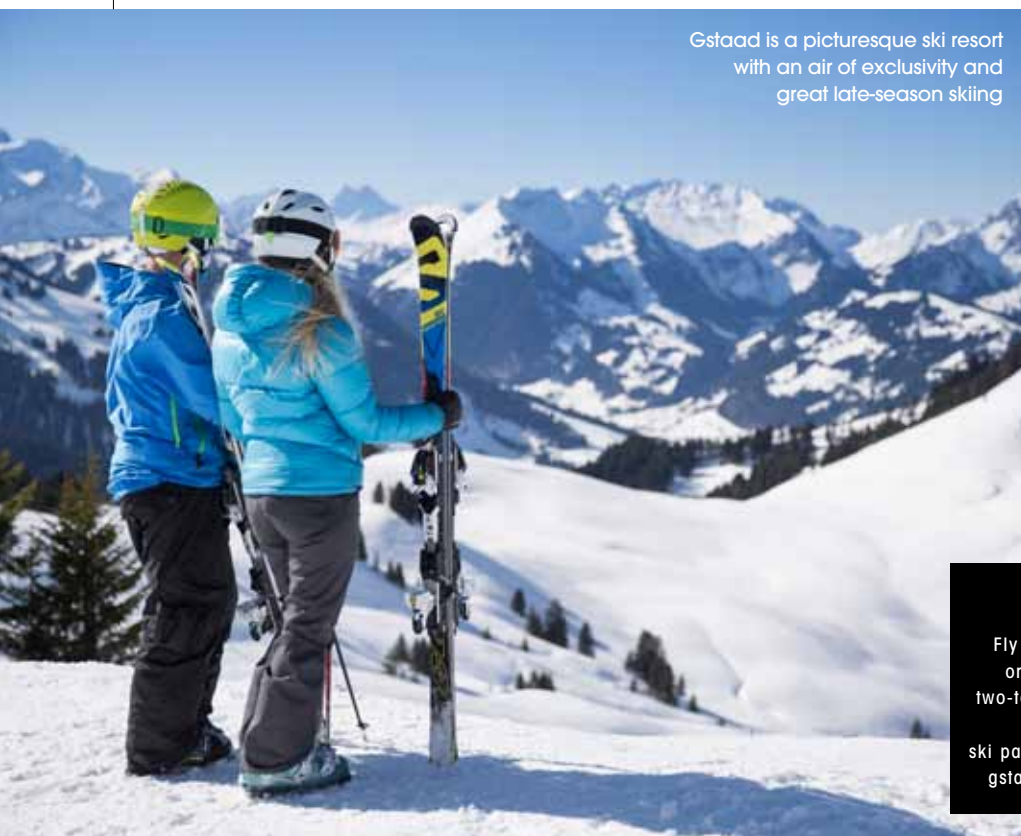
Enjoy a great diversity of ski runs, from the wide and gentle to powdery mountain tops

biking tracks is a fast, winding sledge run. Getting to grips with steering and breaking takes a while, so there were a few wipe outs, but much hilarity. Gstaad is also a great late-season resort – you can ski until May, when the wide slopes are quiet, sunny and lovely.

And where to stay? Assuming Madonna isn't up for visitors, there are four 5-star superior hotels to choose from, including the famous Gstaad Palace and Le Grand Bellevue, as well as 4-star and an increasing number of good 3-star options that are hoping to increase Gstaad's across-the-board appeal.

Take the contemporary 4-star Arc-En-Ciel, for example. Located right at the foot of the Eggli ski lift, this family-run chalet-hotel is great for swift, easy access to the slopes. The attic suites are fabulous and there's also a spa and pizzeria (double rooms from CHF 255). Up the road in Lauenen is the 3-star Hotel Alpenland with rustically furnished rooms and a charmingly retro Alpine restaurant that serves great food and local wines (double rooms from CHF 185). Located beside a nature reserve and a 10-minute drive from the centre of Gstaad, this place is favoured by those who like quieter surrounds and long winter hikes with their dogs, which are more than welcome at the hotel.

Gstaad is a picturesque ski resort with an air of exclusivity and great late-season skiing



## TRIP NOTES

Fly Swiss Air from Heathrow to Zurich or Geneva, from where Gstaad is a two-to-three hour journey by rail or road.

For further information on ski passes, accommodation and travel, see [gstaad.ch](http://gstaad.ch) and [swisstravelsystem.co.uk](http://swisstravelsystem.co.uk)