

# Like clockwork — the joy of Switzerland by rail and water

Get ready for snow-capped peaks, glittering blue lakes and as much wine as you want in a country that makes travelling without a car a cinch, writes **Jeremy Watson**

**W**e are deep in Alain Chollet's cellar on the slopes above one of Switzerland's biggest lakes and he is showing us the saxophone he plays to his wine. "Only once a day for three months,"

he clarifies, in case we think him quite mad. "Positive music," he stresses, "and the sound waves go through it and disturb the molecules. We can't prove it scientifically but we are sure it makes the wine better."

We had hiked up from the lakeside village of Grandvaux to meet Chollet, one of the vineyard owners who tends the 1,900 acres of the Lavaux appellation on the steep south-facing inclines above Lake Geneva.

It's a Unesco heritage site for its cultural value, and Swiss winemakers have been active here for centuries on the chalky terroir and fertile moraine left by glaciers 40,000 years ago. The stone walls propping up the terraces to prevent landslides are wonders in themselves; there are enough in this tiny patch to run the length of Switzerland.

Leaving Monsieur Chollet to his vines, we dropped down through the ancient terraces to the veranda of a 15th-century lakeside chateau to taste the steely whites and plump reds — accompanied by the nutty, creamy cheeses of the area — they have been perfecting in these parts for a thousand years.

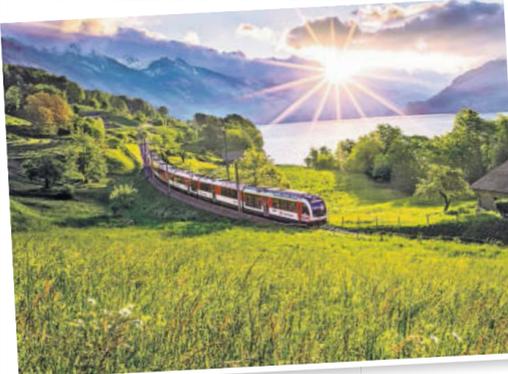
After all no one had to drive home. That's the joy of Swiss travel: crisscrossed by impeccably integrated railways, bus routes and even funiculars, the country is a cinch to cross entirely sans car.

I had started in Geneva, brandishing my Swiss rail pass (£194 for three days unlimited travel; raileurope.com), for the 45-minute train journey to Lausanne (where all public transport is free). After lunch in the garden of the Royal Savoy Hotel & Spa (B&B doubles from £411 a night; royalsavoylausanne.com), I set out by bus along Lake Geneva to Grandvaux, drinking up the panorama of lakes and mountains.

It doesn't take long to become a fan of the efficient double-decker trains that connect the main cities. From Lausanne I glided high past the lake into a rolling countryside of dense forests and contented cows, arriving an hour later in Bern, the Swiss capital since 1848.

A five-minute stroll from the station stands the elegant 160-year-old Hotel Schweizerhof & Spa, a grande dame with a culinary reputation to match (B&B doubles from £322 a night; schweizerhofbern.com). On arrival, I received a free Bern pass, giving access once again to the city's public transport network, but sometimes you just have to stretch your legs.

Cocooned in a loop of the River Aare, old Bern is a chilled, compact city that belies its reputation as the staid political centre of the country. Meandering along its medieval streets, I goggled at the



Clockwise from main: the Landwasser Viaduct; Steamboat Uri, Switzerland's oldest paddle steamer; the Luzern-Interlaken Express

ornate 15th-century clock tower, ducked under historic arcades to browse the shops and rested in pavement cafés.

And, of course, ate chocolate. At Casa Nobile on Rathausgasse, the chocolatier Willi Schmutz sources the world's best beans, adds Swiss milk and a dazzling array of ingredients from Amalfi lemons to ginger schnapps to sculpt creations that have earned Casa Nobile "six beans" — his calling's highest accolade.

Bern to Lucerne is another hour by rail and it's a short walk from the station to the Lake Lucerne quayside, departure point for a 30-minute boat transfer to the Bürgenstock Resort. Set 450m above

the lake, the resort comprises four shamelessly pricey hotels that have been wowing visitors since 1873 (B&B doubles at the Palace Hotel from £597 a night; burgenstockresort.com).

Disembarking at the foot of a cliff, I was whisked by funicular up to the main hotel and ushered down a dark corridor into a glass-fronted atrium looking back down the length of Switzerland's fourth-largest lake. Moments later we gawped again at the perfect combination of blue water and snow-capped peaks, this time from a heated infinity pool.

With 120 activities on offer (including milking cows) I took a cheesemaking

class from an Emmenthal master, rode a dizzying 117-year-old lift up a cliff to the Hammetschwand viewing platform and played golf on a beautiful Alpine course. Walking fairways echoing with cowbells, in a country where public transport works like clockwork. What could be more Swiss than that?

Jeremy Watson was a guest of Bürgenstock Selection ([burgenstockselection.com](http://burgenstockselection.com)). Fly from Edinburgh to Geneva from £54 return or to Zurich from £76 return with Swiss; or with easyJet from Edinburgh and Glasgow to Geneva from £33

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## 5 of the best

Wild swimming spots  
Peter Irvine

### The Pools in Glen Etive

Glen Etive in the Highlands is a wild, enchanted place where people have been camping for years to walk and climb in the Glen Coe area. There are many grassy landings at the riverside, as well as these perfect pools for bathing. The first is about three miles with the A82 at Kingshouse, but just follow the River Etive and you will find your own. Take midge cream for eveningwear. Lots.

### By Elba Bridge, near Duns

I came to this spot between Abbey St Bathans and Duns years ago and then forgot how to find it. Park near Toot Corner and then head down through the woods via Edin's Hall Broch to Elba footbridge. There's possibly a better way because this is a 3km walk, but it's so worth it — this has one of the longest stretches of pristine water in rocky, wooded surroundings in southern Scotland.

### Rumbling Bridge, Kinross

An excellent stretch of cascading river with pools and rocky banks. Just off the A9 heading north, opposite the first turning for Dunkeld, the A822 for Aberfeldy, Amulree (signed Crieff/Crianlarich). The car park is on the right after 2½ miles, and connects with the Braan Walk to the Hermitage. Fab picnic and swimming spot though take great care. The nearest Highland-type river to Edinburgh.

### Rob Roy's Bathtub, near Inverarnan

Park about two miles north of the Drover's Inn on the A82, then follow the riverside path. There are some pools on the rocky river course but not far from the car park you reach Falloch Falls, and below them a perfect round pool. There are smooth slabs at the edge of the falls and it is a natural suntrap in summer (if there is a summer).

### Swimmer's Quarry, Easdale

Cross to Easdale on the wee boat (five minutes; continuous service). Do visit the museum and the Puffer pub but go beyond the scattered houses to the slate quarries full of seawater since 1881, with clear water like a hotel pool. The L-shaped one is easiest; the water can be blue like the Aegean.

From Scotland the Best by Pete Irvine published by HarperCollins at £15.99



Above and below: the interiors at LVMH's Glenmorangie House, which was redesigned by Russell Sage last year

## There are no half measures in this zany temple to whisky

Muddy hiking boots and high heels are equally welcome in a reinvented Glenmorangie House, finds **Mhairi Mann**

**I**t's cocktail hour at Glenmorangie House. As if by magic a concealed bar opens in the wall to reveal an array of honey-hued whisky bottles, in a room lavished from top to toe in gleaming gold. A sports car crunches up the driveway, fresh from a spin through the Cairngorms.

This gilded jewellery box overlooking the Moray Firth one hour north of Inverness is the work of the designer Russell Sage. Glenmorangie's proprietor, LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton, hired the interiors supremo to refurbish its Highland hotel in January 2021, transforming it from a classic country house into a no-expense-spared "sensory playground". Sage, who also reincarnated the Fife Arms in Braemar, was given carte blanche: the result is a zany, immersive ode to the single malt.

Interiors reflect the various stages of whisky production. The glistening morning room takes its cue from golden barley fields, while the dining room is a molten-hued milieu with Tom Dixon pendant lights, inspired by the distillery's grand copper pot stills. These are the tallest stills in Scotland, equal in height to an adult male giraffe (which appears as a playful mascot throughout the house, found on wall hooks, artwork and cushion covers). In the lounge a mix of *Scottish Field* magazine and *The Economist* indicates the varied demographic drawn here, to a house where hiking boots and high heels are equally welcome.

Spaces are swathed in hand-painted Fromental wallpaper, dotted with flowers, berries and butterflies. Each of the nine bedrooms further demonstrates the designer's riotous flair for colour and texture. Thoughtful details appear at every turn, such as drawers lined with a map of Spain in reference to sherry casks. Antique chairs are upcycled in zingy chevron fabrics, while Scotland's historic Hilton of Cadboll Stone (a short walk away) inspires the graphic floor coverings by Turnberry Rug Works.

Let's get one thing clear: it's GLEN-MOR-angie — rhyming with orangey, not GLEN-mor-AN-gie, as it is often

mispronounced — named after Morangie Farm, site of the distillery founded by William Matheson in 1843, 11 miles from Glenmorangie House over on the Dornoch Firth.

LVMH bought the label in 2004 and turned it from a niche whisky into a global brand. The distillery itself has also had a new lease of life with the unveiling of the Lighthouse, a 20m-high glass tower of whisky experimentation. It is headed up by Bill Lumsden, dubbed the "Willy Wonka of whisky" for his madcap streak of innovation.

Back to cocktail hour at Glenmorangie House, and the Beatles are humming on a Roberts Radio while a French barman tries his best to pronounce Ardbeg, also under the LVMH umbrella. For those less keen on single malts, you can drink any number of premium champagnes from the company's portfolio.

To be at Glenmorangie House is like being cast in a play. Following an early evening aperitif, guests come together for an intimate group meal. Ordinarily this kind of forced conviviality would be stilted, but it really works. There are common points of interest that pull the group together — whisky, the decor and an appreciation for the Highland setting. The flowing wine also helps. I mingle with Americans, New Zealanders and Swiss; it's refreshing to find so many nationalities in one room again.

The four-course set menu draws on Scotland's larder but avoids the clichés. It includes salmon in a soy glaze, plump Barbary duck and a rhubarb and vanilla mousse with chai sorbet, all properly sourced and perfectly cooked. Glenmorangie House is designed to feel like a private home: no check-in desk, room keys or TVs. Instead guests are encouraged to meander the serene, expansive grounds and neighbouring beach, attend cookery classes and whisky tastings, or have a go at archery. There are also, of course, the area's world-famous golf courses.

The charming fishing village of Portmahomack is six miles away or embark on an EcoVentures boat trip in the increasingly cool village of Cromarty (home to a mini cinema, and art and film festivals).

Flamboyant interiors at Glenmorangie House are only rivaled by the surrounding landscape: layers of grass, heather and golden sand set against the shimmering expanse of the Moray Firth. There are plans afoot for a bar and dining area in the garden. They'll need the space — an available room is as rare as its specialist single malts. And just as utterly unique.

### Need to know

Mhairi Mann was a guest of Glenmorangie House, which has B&B doubles from £290, dinner from £60pp; [theglenmorangiehouse.com](http://theglenmorangiehouse.com)