

Serene slopes, superb skiing

The beautiful Val d'Anniviers is a skier's paradise, says Kevin Coyd

The Val d'Anniviers is a hidden gem of the Swiss Alps. In the canton of Valais, surrounded by 45 peaks of 13,000ft, it is part of one of Europe's greatest winter playgrounds.

The five village resorts of the Val d'Anniviers, ranged across both sides of an 18-mile valley, serve a vast and varied area of ski terrain. Yet you won't find crowded pistes, long lift-queues or bars booming out loud music – there's nothing to spoil the splendour and serenity of the mountains.

Even more remarkably, this little-known valley is merely 15 miles as the crow flies from the popular resorts of Verbier and Zermatt. The scenery is stunning, with the valley encircled by the "Imperial Crown" of five peaks above 13,000ft.

A single lift pass grants access to all three ski areas (Grimentz-Zinal, St-Luc-Chandolin and Vercorin) which are linked by a free shuttle-bus service. Whichever resort you choose, you'll be in easy reach of more than 100 pistes. And because of the high altitude and excellent snow record, the Val d'Anniviers is open to skiers and snowboarders from mid-November all the way to the end of April.

Each resort has its own distinct character. Grimentz is best known for the ancient granaries that still stand proud among its wooden, shingle-roofed chalets. The village is steeped in tradition, from the geranium displays that decorate its narrow alleys to



Mountain retreat: escape to the scenic beauty of peaceful Val d'Anniviers

Special offer

The luxurious Chalet CBC in Grimentz, a few minutes' walk from the village centre and close to the piste, can be booked from £2,500 per week for a group of eight guests on a self-catering basis through Alpine Guru. See alpineguru.com or call 0203 004 8750.

the "glacier wine" stored in a huge vat in the municipal hall and topped up with each year's vintage.

Last year saw the launch of a cable car that can whisk you up from Grimentz to the slopes above Zinal in just seven-and-a-half minutes. Spanning more than two miles, it's an impressive engineering feat and the third-longest cableway in Switzerland.

En route, you'll pass

over the famous Piste du Chamois, an epic descent from the highest point in the ski area to the valley floor, via a quiet forest. However, there are plenty of more gentle itineraries around Zinal for beginners and intermediate skiers.

St-Luc and Chandolin are ideal family-skiing destinations with lots of wide, sweeping runs to explore above the tree line.

Chandolin itself is one of Europe's highest villages and, because it's located on the south-facing side of the valley, it's a sound choice for sun-worshippers.

St-Luc, by contrast, is famous among those who prefer the moon and stars – it's the location of the François-Xavier-Bagnoud Observatory, which takes advantage of the clear alpine skies. A nearby four-mile "Planet Trail" is one of the most popular

walking routes in the Val d'Anniviers.

Meanwhile, lovers of nature and culture will be drawn to Vercorin. Located on the Vallon de Réchy nature reserve, it's known for its art galleries and a museum devoted to Swiss artist Edouard Vallet.

There's skiing to suit everyone: like the other two ski areas, it has a snow park where freestylers can perfect their tricks and there are excellent opportunities for going off piste with a guide.

However, winter in the Val d'Anniviers isn't just about skiing. The activities on offer include tobogganing, ice skating and snow-shoe excursions.

For an entirely different angle on the Alpine scenery, you can take a paragliding lesson and soar above the valley – an unforgettable experience.

For more information about Val D'Anniviers visit valdanniviers.ch

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