

## Travel Europe: Three Swiss ski resorts that don't break the bank

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**Suzanne Morphet**

Special to the Star

Hear "Switzerland" and your first thought may be "too expensive." Ritzzy ski resorts like St. Moritz, Klosters and Zermatt that attract rock stars and royalty fuel the country's reputation as an exclusive destination.

But there are some relatively inexpensive, even rustic, resorts that offer interesting terrain and a glimpse of local culture. And with Switzerland's incomparable network of trains, buses, and boats you don't need to rent a car to get to your destination, no matter how off-the-trendy-track it is. (Purchase a Swiss Pass and the entire transportation system is yours.) These three resorts in the Valais region, the sunniest part of Switzerland, are worth investigating.

### Crans-Montana

Situated on a plateau almost a mile above sea level, Crans-Montana offers panoramic views, broad pistes and, according to a medical study, the cleanest air in Switzerland. It's just the place to spend your days outdoors, including lunching on a restaurant terrace, basking in the sun.



It's easy to get off the beaten track in Crans-Montana where snowshoeing is a popular winter activity.

TOURISM CRANS-MONTANA

Crans-Montana hosted the first downhill event in the history of skiing, back in 1911. Today, the resort encompasses six villages and offers lots to do aside from skiing.

One evening I joined a guided hike on snowshoes to the Relais restaurant, which focuses on preserving local history by serving traditional food such as polenta and cheese fondue. While you're eating, black and white photos from days-gone-by flash on the walls, showing how families once practiced vertical farming, driving cattle from village to village and living in high-altitude chalets.

The most fun was at the end of the evening when we put on headlamps, mounted sledges (small sleds on runners) and practically flew back down the path we hiked up earlier.

**Special:** Colombire's "ski for all, all for ski" package for two includes three nights in a 3-star hotel, half board, daily ski passes, and lunch on the slopes. From \$448. Some dates exempt. [colombire.ch](http://colombire.ch)

### Riederalp

The antithesis of busy ski resorts like Zermatt, Riederalp has virtually no après-ski scene and few restaurants or hotels.

But what this family-friendly resort does offer is tranquility and stunning views over the Aletsch Glacier. The Aletsch is the longest ice flow in the Alps at 23 km. Even in winter, covered with snow, the winding ribbon of ice is spectacular, with mountains rising up on both sides.

Take time out from skiing to hike along the ridge on a hard-packed trail with views over the glacier. The walk from Moosfluh cable car station back to the village takes about 2.5 hours and descends through pine-scented forest.

Speaking of walking, you'll be doing lots of it in Riederalp, as there are no streets and no cars! You'll see people pulling children or groceries — or both — on toboggans. (When you arrive with luggage, you can take a snow-cat taxi to where you're staying.)

**Special:** From Jan. 5 to 26, a seven-day package including hotel, half-board and a six-day ski pass, starts at about \$1,112 per person in a double

room. [riederalp.ch](http://riederalp.ch), [myswitzerland.com](http://myswitzerland.com)

## Leukerbad

Tucked between two mountains, one with near vertical walls, Leukerbad used to be hammered by avalanches. It was completely destroyed seven times in the 16th Century alone.

Today, those mountains provide easily accessible outdoor recreation while avalanche barriers keep everyone safe. It's hard to overstate just how much there is to do here. Besides downhill, backcountry and cross-country skiing, hiking, snowshoeing and sledging, the village offers indoor skating, tennis, soccer, climbing, you-name-it.

But what Leukerbad is best-known for is the hot mineral water that bubbles out of the ground and fills 30 pools every day, including 10 at Burgerbad Therme, an enormous complex that also boasts saunas, steam rooms, spa treatments, and water slides for kids.

I spent one perfect day hiking part of the Gemmi Pass, an old Roman road and trading route that links Leukerbad with Kanderstag in the next valley, returning the same way (about 26 km roundtrip if you do the entire pass), then immersing myself in the steaming outdoor pool at Lindner Alpentherme, another thermal bath complex.

**Special:** "Sleep and Ski" packages are available for stays of three nights or longer at participating hotels. For dates, rates and hotels, go to [leukerbad.ch](http://leukerbad.ch).

***Suzanne Morphet** is a freelance writer based in Victoria, B.C. Her visit was subsidized by Swiss Tourism.*