

Right Verbier is most definitely a summer riding destination, but even then, there can sometimes be snow up top



DESTINATION

Verbier

The Swiss Alps are home to some of the most exclusive ski resorts in the world. But come summer, the area transforms into a road cycling paradise – if you don't mind the odd Alpine ascent along the way. If choosing one place to base yourself in, it's hard to look beyond the Swiss chocolate-box village of Verbier. With panoramic views of the Matterhorn (of Toblerone fame) and Mont Blanc, you're guaranteed stunning scenery as you pedal.

You're also sure to encounter some elevation. Situated roughly at the halfway point on the 1,339m climb from La Châlbe to Croix de Coeur (as made famous in the 2023 Giro d'Italia), the start of any ride involves





Left Experience the climb to the Croix de Coeur pass above Verbier, a route that featured in the 2023 Giro d'Italia

Below You'll definitely notch up some elevation in these mountains, but the views are well worth the effort



going up or down. Whizzing down the 8.5km descent into the Val de Bagnes valley below is arguably the easier of the two, and its 13 switchbacks will ensure that you're fully awake by the time you reach the flat. You'll soon be climbing, but there's a wealth of bucket-list passes that can be ticked off during your stay. The Col du Grand-Saint-Bernard (2,469m) that straddles the Italian border is a 40km spin to the south, while Col du Sanetsch (2,253m) is also within riding distance. Although lesser known, the out-and-back loop along the Dranse de Bagnes river to Lac de Mauvoisin reservoir is just as rewarding (and lactic acid-inducing), complete with sightings of marmots and ibex amongst the spruce-dotted hills that flank the road as you snake your way to the dam-topped summit.

Whatever your plans, keep some energy in reserve for tackling the final 664m ascent back up to Verbier. A climb made famous by Alberto Contador at the 2009 Tour de France – where the Spaniard threw down the hammer with 5.5km to go to retake the yellow jersey in a Tour-winning move – it's a tough but rewarding way to end a hard day in the saddle. Legs too tired? Take the 25-minute cable car from La Châlbe.

Big dates

While Grand Tours (Tour de France, 2009; Giro d'Italia, 2023) and other WorldTour races (Tour de Suisse,

Tour de Romandie) have been here, it may be a while before you see the professional peloton spinning through the streets of Verbier again. Amongst the amateur ranks, though, each August, the village hosts the finish line of the Tour des Stations – a collection of gran fondos that range from the Mediofondo (74km, 2,900m elevation) through to the Ultrafondo the Everest (242km, 8,848m ascent).

Don't miss

The climb from La Châlbe to Verbier. At 8.45km long, the road takes you up from the Val de Bagnes to the centre of the ski resort. While the hairpin bends and 7.9% average ramps can be busy, its use in the 2023 Giro d'Italia means there are some top-tier names on its Strava KOM leaderboard to compare yourself to.

Travel

Geneva is the closest airport to Verbier, and several airlines fly direct from the UK. Transfer from the airport to La Châlbe takes 2.5hrs by train (28.60 CHF), and it's possible to catch the 13min cable car (6 CHF) or 12min 251 bus to the resort. Both the train and cable car take bikes.

Accommodation

Hotel Bristol in the town centre is reasonably priced in summer.

Tourist information

valais.ch

The route

● Morning ride to Lac de Mauvoisin and back from Verbier that encapsulates the best of Switzerland in miniature; hair-raising descents, undulating asphalt through sleepy Swiss villages, one of the world's highest dams, and grinding Alpine climbs. Only possible in summer once the snow has melted.

01. Bike shop

● Verbier's bike shops are more off-road-leaning, but British ex-pat Adam Sedgwick runs Haut Velo (hautvelo.com) – a one-stop shop for guiding and tours –

and is happy to help, whatever your requirements.

02. Lunch stop

● Café de la Promenade, Bonatchiesse (Rte de Mauvoisin 533) is a worthy reward before descending back down into the Val de Bagnes, although you might be better off saving the Swiss staples of fondue and raclette until you've finished climbing...

03. Photo op

● The view from the top of the dam out across the 5km-long Lac de Mauvoisin is serious selfie territory.

Distance 56km **Elevation** 1,880m
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