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10 Best Towns to Visit in Switzerland With Fairy-tale Castles, Stunning Mountain Views, and Gorgeous Alpine Lakes

The best small towns in Switzerland include lakeside retreats, historic villages, and destinations tucked away in the Alps.

By [Lydia Mansel](#) | Published on September 10, 2024



Facade of buildings in La Neuveville, Switzerland. Photo: Margarita Almpanzou/Getty Images

Switzerland's beauty is legendary, and it comes in all forms — from snow-capped mountains and freshwater lakes to picturesque pastoral scenes and charming architecture. While the country's larger cities are gorgeous in their own right, it's in the small towns and tiny villages that you can fully immerse yourself in this Swiss splendor. Plus, with over 2,000 municipalities, Switzerland offers a seemingly endless number of day trips and pit stops.

Now you just have to decide where to go. "Most travelers have limited time and want to pack as much as possible into an itinerary, which turns into moving from one hotel to the next and limits time to explore the region," says Travel + Leisure A-List travel advisor [Sofia Markovich](#). Instead of switching up your location every couple of days, Martin Meier, a spokesperson for Switzerland's national railway company, [SBB](#), recommends "choosing a small town as a home base and planning several excursions by public transport from there." It's a travel strategy that may seem difficult to Americans, but it's relatively easy in Switzerland — especially if you invest in the [Swiss Travel Pass](#), which grants you unlimited travel by train, bus, and boat.

As you begin to plot out your trip, remember that Switzerland has four national languages: German, French, Italian, and Romansh. "This not only influences how one speaks in each region but also has a great cultural impact that is reflected in architecture, cuisine, and even the character of people," says Valérie Chételat, a hiking guide with [Switzerland Trekking](#). "For a proper dose of 'Swissness,' I suggest you visit at least one small town of each language region."

With her advice in mind, read on to discover the best towns in Switzerland, according to local experts.

01 | Vevey

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View of Vevey on Lake Geneva in Switzerland. PHOTO: PINTAI SUCHACHAISRI/GETTY IMAGES

According to Markovich, Vevey, which is located on the shores of Lake Geneva, “offers a unique blend of natural beauty, cultural richness, and historical significance that makes it an appealing travel destination.” When visiting Vevey, travelers can discover the town’s art galleries, music festivals, and theaters, as well as [Alimentarium](#), the world’s first museum dedicated to food and nutrition, and [Chaplin’s World](#), a museum honoring Charlie Chaplin that’s housed in his former residence. For an extra-luxurious trip to Vevey, Markovich recommends [Grand Hôtel du Lac](#): “It offers stunning views, elegant rooms, a spa, and Michelin-starred dining.”

02 | Montreux

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Architecture in Montreux, Switzerland. PHOTO: ELVIRKIN/GETTY IMAGES

Both Markovich and Meier have Montreux on their list of must-visit small towns in Switzerland. It boasts views of Lake Geneva and the Alps, which Markovich says “makes it a haven for nature lovers and adventure seekers.” It also hosts the [Montreux Jazz Festival](#) in July, bringing music enthusiasts from across the world to the small town. “Whether you’re visiting for the music, the mountains, or the magical ambiance, Montreux is a destination that leaves a lasting impression on all who experience its beauty,” she adds. Not planning to visit in July? Meier recommends the Christmas market on the lake, known as Montreux Noël, or a boat trip to [Chillon Castle](#).

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Soglio



View of mountains from Soglio, Switzerland. PHOTO: CHRISRINCKES/GETTY IMAGES

"Soglio, often called 'the gateway to paradise,' is a remote village high above the Bregaglia Valley in the south of Switzerland. Its exceptional location overlooking the peaks over 10,000 feet will take your breath away," says Chételat. The Church of St. Lorenzo is the main point of interest in town, but Chételat notes this is also a place where you can find hikes for all fitness levels. "Choose between an easy stroll through the picturesque village, a short hike in the nearby chestnut forests, or a multi-day valley trek," she says.

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Wengen



Wengen, Switzerland. PHOTO: JOANNE WASTCHAK/GETTY IMAGES

You don't need to rent a car to access Wengen; in fact, it's not even allowed. The car-free resort town in the Bernese Oberland is a favorite in both the summer and the winter, as locals and visitors alike take advantage of the town's hiking and biking trails and access to ski areas. In true Swiss fashion, Wengen features a number of chalet-style homes, snow-capped mountains, and bucolic scenes in nearly every direction. If you're feeling up for a 30-minute walk from town, follow the trail to the Hunneflue panorama point, where you'll be rewarded with views of Interlaken and Lüttschine Valley.

05 | Vals

of 10



Houses in Vals, Switzerland. PHOTO: CLU/GETTY IMAGES

Vals is a mountain village (with an elevation of about 4,100 feet) that lays claim to a natural 86-degree spring – the only one in the Grisons canton to come directly from the ground. “If you only ever go to one thermal bath in your life, be sure to make it [Peter Zumthor’s Therme](#),” says Chételat. “The Swiss architect has created a sensational and sensory experience built from locally quarried quartzite slabs. It’s the perfect reward after a strenuous day of hiking or mountain biking to relax in these naturally occurring thermal springs.”

06 | Sion

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Cobblestone pathway in Sion, Switzerland. PHOTO: RHYMAN007/GETTY IMAGES

Though it’s larger than some of the other destinations on this list, Sion (population of around 35,000) maintains a decidedly charming, small-town feel. “Every Friday morning, you can discover local products and handicrafts at the [old town market](#),” says Meier. Travelers also make their way to Sion to see the Tourbillon Castle and the Basilica of Valeria, which sit on opposite hills that tower over Sion at the Rhône Valley; you can’t miss them. Once you’ve wrapped up sightseeing, you’ll be in a good spot to continue to explore Switzerland. “Sion is an ideal starting point for traveling through the Valais and its numerous peaks,” says Meier. One of those peaks, the Matterhorn, may ring a bell.

07 Stein am Rhein

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Old town center in Stein am Rhein, Switzerland. PHOTO: IMAGEBROKER/WERNER DIETERICH/GETTY IMAGES

If you'd never been to Switzerland and had to picture a Swiss town in your head, there's a good chance it would resemble Stein am Rhein. Walking through the old town, you'll see half-timbered houses and colorful, elaborate frescoes around the Rathausplatz (the town square). When you're done ogling the beauty and snapping photos, head in the direction of St. George's Abbey — a former Benedictine monastery complex, now a museum — on the Rhine River, or Hohenklingen, a medieval castle that dates back to the 11th century.

08 La Neuveville

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Facade of buildings in La Neuveville, Switzerland. PHOTO: MARGARITA ALMPANEZOU/GETTY IMAGES

You'll find the town of La Neuveville on Lake Biel in the western, French-speaking part of Switzerland. "Its cobble-stoned medieval old town is embedded between the lake and the hills of the Jura mountain range," says Chételat. "I love to enjoy a traditional cheese fondue at [Buvette du Débarcadère](#), an unpretentious pop-up restaurant right on the edge of the water." When you're not enjoying a lakeside meal, hire a pedal boat or kayak to paddle around Lake Biel, take a guided history tour, or taste some local wines (La Neuveville has a number of vineyards nearby).



Facade of houses in Gruyère, Switzerland. PHOTO: ELENARTS108/GETTY IMAGES

Meier describes Gruyères as a town where “the Middle Ages meet the film 'Alien,' all surrounded by the fine aroma of Gruyère cheese.” The first part of that description refers to the history and architecture of Gruyères; you can, and should, visit the 13th-century [Gruyères Castle](#) while touring the town. His reference to "Alien" stems from the fact that the [HR Giger Museum](#) is located in Gruyères. Here, visitors can see the Oscar-winning artist's surreal paintings, sculptures, and film designs for "Alien," "Alien 3," and "Poltergeist 2." Finally, as you may have guessed, Gruyère cheese was named after the town where it first originated, and today's visitors can learn more about the cheese and how it's made at [La Maison du Gruyère](#).



Cathedral in Solothurn, Switzerland. PHOTO: BORISB17/GETTY IMAGES

“This small town on the River Aare is considered the most beautiful Baroque town in Switzerland,” says Meier. It's also full of interesting sites to keep travelers busy and entertained. Old Town Solothurn, which doesn't allow car traffic, has 11 churches and chapels, plus the same amount of towers and fountains. If you prefer museums, you'll appreciate the [Natural History Museum](#), the Blumenstein Museum, the [Museum of Stones](#), and [Old Arsenal](#), which has one of the largest weapons collections in Europe. Or, for those travelers who want to soak up the great outdoors, Meier says, “You can combine a visit with a cruise on the Aare or a hike up the Weissenstein.”