

INTERNATIONAL

Make the most of an Alpine autumn

Between the summer sun and winter sports, these Swiss resorts show off their multi-coloured beauty, says Zoe Dare Hall

Swiss resorts, like all Alpine destinations, are increasingly talked about these days in terms of their dual-season appeal. It's part of the push to get visitors and property buyers to see them as a summer destination as much as a place that's about hurtling down snowy slopes in winter.

But the real star of the show is autumn. The vast, multi-coloured landscapes – and lack of crowds – make this the most Instagrammable of seasons, yet it's still something of a secret. Think deep, glassy blue lakes and flame-coloured trees, hazy sunlight that bathes the valley floor and white-capped mountains beyond hills of brilliant

The hillsides are so steep vineyards are harvested by hand and the grapes are airlifted by helicopter

green. Take Grimentz, the picture postcard 15th-century village in the Valais canton. At this time of year, Alpine male voice choirs meet there for a weekend of singing, and local residents converge in the Brisolée Royale, a festival of all the produce of the local harvests, set against a backdrop of larch trees that glow gold in the autumn sun. You can soak it all up from Les Chalets d'Adelaide, with ski-in, ski-out apartments and chalets serviced by a new boutique hotel, priced from €778,000 (£682,000) for two bedrooms through Mark Warner Property.

For those who want autumnal activity, Champéry – under two hours by car from Geneva – may suit, with its many sporting events, including a paragliding festival, a curling championship and the Swiss Peaks Trail for runners, plus a chance to wind down at the film festival in November. Two-bedroom apartments in the new Le Montagnier development, which will be ready in 2019, cost from €873,000 through Mark Warner Property.

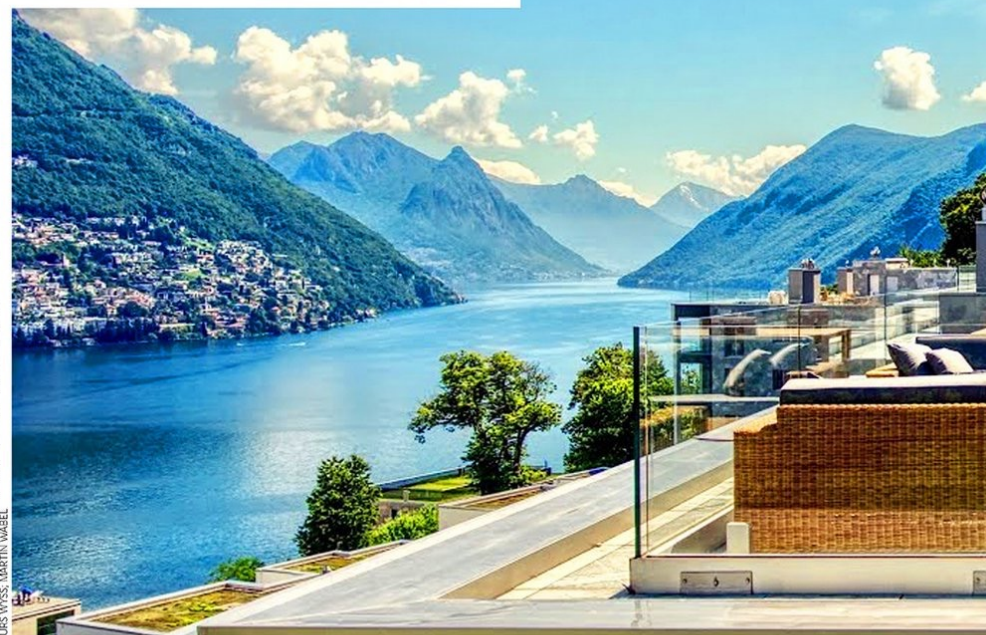
"For me, autumn is all about the smells," says Jeremy Rollason, head of Savills Ski, as his mind wanders on to thoughts of wine harvests and "la chasse". "This is hunting season, so restaurants serve lovely local produce and it's a great time to visit. The grape harvest is particularly dramatic in the

vineyards around Sion in the Valais canton, one of Switzerland's oldest towns," he adds. "The hillsides are so steep that they are harvested by hand, then the grapes are airlifted by helicopter to the presses – hence the high price of Swiss wine."

Now may be the time to explore the mountains on two wheels, indulge in foodie festivals and witness the annual "désalpe", when cows adorned with flowers descend from the mountains to the villages. But it is also the time to house-hunt if you are looking to buy a

HIGH LIFE

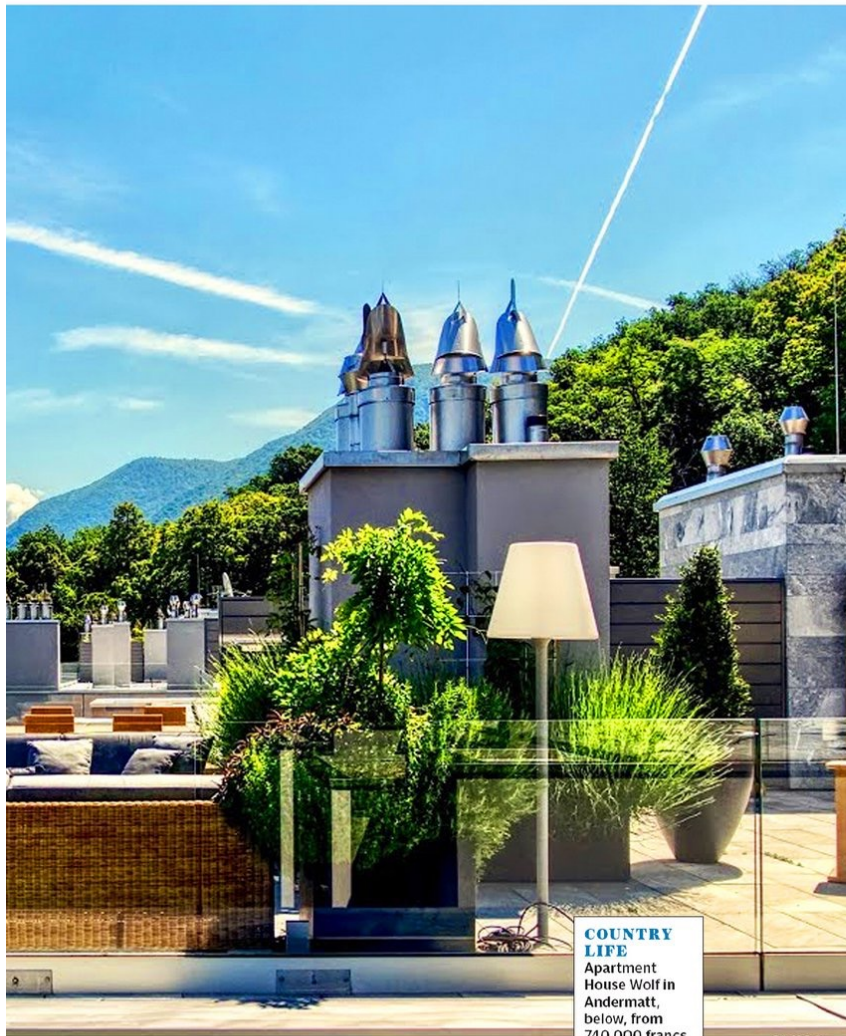
A penthouse in Ticino, main and left, 7.27 million francs (£5.6m); a Bauhaus villa, below, 6.23 million francs (£4.8m), both with Christie's International Real Estate; the former home of actor David Niven, below left, near Gstaad, 6.5 million francs (£5m) through Aylesford International



property in time for this ski season, as a Swiss property deal typically takes four months to tie up.

As a result of the country's "Lex Weber" – the laws that set a cap on the number of second homes in each canton – demand is now largely focused on resale property. It's particularly strong in Verbier in the Four Valleys, according to Savills, which is marketing the new Résidence du Parc, with seven apartments in the town centre starting from £3.6million.

"The Lex Weber also allows Swiss



COUNTRY LIFE
Apartment
House Wolf in
Andermatt,
below, from
740,000 francs
(£570,000),
through Sphere
Estates

owners to sell to non-Swiss for the first time, as long as the property is in a touristic area," says Rollason. "So although there are fewer new-builds available now, there are far more resale properties available to foreign buyers, for which you don't need a permit."

If you really want to find an autumnal microclimate, consider Montreux and Lugano, according to Knight Frank's Swiss expert Alex Koch de Gooreynd. "Montreux is protected by steep hillsides and it is the only place in Switzerland where palm trees grow," he

says, adding that many buyers visit around this time of year to go horse-riding in the woods, cycle around the lake and go walking and wine-tasting.

"You may not be swimming in the lake at this time of year, but you can paddle board," he adds. "And there's the train from Montreux to Gstaad that passes through beautiful hillside villages where you can hop on and off on request."

Montreux doesn't come cheap. Its proximity to Geneva and to great skiing

– with Verbier, Villars and Gstaad all around 30 to 60 minutes away by car – plus its famous jazz festival, a train service that runs like clockwork and the lake lifestyle, mean it's in demand.

The housing stock is mainly apartments, with prices from 850,000 francs (£655,000) for a one-bedroom flat with a lake view, and from 3.5 million francs (£2.7 million) for a three-bedroom lakefront apartment, both through Knight Frank. Houses with lake views can command more than £10 million. "Some buyers are politically and financially motivated," says Koch de Gooreynd. "They see Montreux as an interesting bolt-hole to invest in property rather than leave their cash in a Swiss bank with negative interest rates."

Lugano is known as Switzerland's "sun room" due to its mild climate from a similarly protected location surrounded by mountains, says Ueli Schnorf, of Wetag Consulting, a Christie's International Real Estate affiliate agent.

"The grape harvest is a quintessential part of autumn in Ticino. Taking part in the grape harvest or tasting wines in one of its renowned wineries after an enjoyable bike ride is an unforgettable experience," says Schnorf. For Koch de Gooreynd, further joy comes from knowing that, when it's cold and raining in Zurich, "you can be basking in sunshine on Lake Lugano and eating outdoors long into the October eve-

WINE COUNTRY
An eco-villa with a pool in Ticino, below, 6.35 million francs (£4.9m) with Christie's International Real Estate



nings". Lugano comes with the added appeal of proximity to Italy – Milan is an hour's drive away – which lends it a distinct Italian character. "It has that ideal combination of Swiss efficiency and Italian lifestyle, and the whole of Lake Lugano is a tourist zone, so non-Swiss are fully able to buy property," Koch de Gooreynd adds.

Further benefits come in its topology: Lugano's steep hillsides mean that even villas and apartments set some way back have lake views, unlike on Lake Geneva, where the relatively flat terrain means you need to be water-front to get the views. Property in Lugano is also about a third cheaper than its Lake Geneva equivalents.

"Lugano is a mecca for wealthy Italian families who want a private office in Switzerland, and it's popular with Britons of retirement age who come for the quality of life and environment," says Koch de Gooreynd. "Other buyers, from the Middle East and Russia, see it as a secure investment, close to Lake Como but in Swiss francs."

For those seeking the growth potential of a less-established location – and

plenty to do on autumnal days and nights – Andermatt should be on the radar. The medieval village, at the foot of the Gotthard Pass and a 90-minute drive from Zurich, was undeveloped until recently, known mainly as the location of the former training ground for the Swiss army.

Now, however, it is part of the way through a £1.3 billion investment in a new development by the Egyptian billionaire Samih Sawiris to turn it into a year-round touristic and property destination.

Andermatt's new landmarks include the five-star Chedi hotel (there are five more luxury hotels are on the way), with residences at the Chedi on sale from £1.55 million through Harrods Estates. A new concert hall that will host large orchestral shows, and whose architecture and capacity will rival venues in European capital cities, is set to open in spring next year.

"This part of the Alps, near Italy, has the best autumn climate," says Simon Barry, head of new developments at Harrods Estates. There is another sweetener for foreign buyers, too. He says: "Andermatt is exempt from the Lex Koller [the original laws that limit what and where non-Swiss can buy] and Lex Weber.

"You can buy from overseas without a permit and sell to non-Swiss, so it has a liquidity about it," says Barry. "It's cheaper than St Moritz or Gstaad and has the potential to become more established as a destination." In the tastiest and more colourful of seasons, it's surely worth taking a look.

