

Saddle up for a sensational cycling holiday in Switzerland and spend your nights in the lap of luxury at jet-set's favourite five-star retreat.

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# Ready, Gstaady, go!

**I pinch myself as I ride smooth roads through rolling hills of lush green pastures and colourful wild flowers.**

I grin ridiculously as I hear the soft clanking of bells and turn a corner to find a herd of placid brown and white Swiss cows.

And my tastebuds are delighted by strong coffee, creamy chocolate and delicate hand-baked biscuits when I stop to "refuel" at a hilltop cafe.

Riding a bike in the south-west Bern region of Switzerland is so dream-like that I expect to wake up at any moment.

Yet there is more of this magical, fairytale-style of cycling holiday to be revealed when I book into the hotel.

Five-star Gstaad Palace, near Saanen, is where the rich and famous come to relax and play – and it's where my pedalling fantasy world is based for the next few days.

Normally associated with a winter skiing holiday or a high-class spa break, Gstaad is now set to make an impression on keen cyclists.

Next year, a new cycling event, the Etape Suisse Gstaad, will offer a unique combination of luxurious accommodation, gourmet dining and two stunning sportive courses.

The routes of 64km and 121km will showcase the silky-smooth roads, wildflower pastures, hills and valleys of this spectacular Alpine region.

There will be challenges in both events with almost 1500m of ascent on the shorter course and more than

3600m of climbs on the longer course. For many riders, these are achievable goals if they train beforehand.

For those who want to reach the finish line with less muscle power, there are Stromer e-bikes for hire.

BMC Switzerland carbon-fibre bikes with electric gears can also be rented by people who plan to pedal but do not want to fly their own bikes to Geneva with them.

And bike-fitting by specialist Cycle Fit will ensure as much comfort on the bike rides as possible.

Etape Suisse Gstaad will also partner the forward-thinking charity Laureus Sport for Good Foundation.

They help young people overcome the limitations imposed by tough social issues by supporting a worldwide programme of sports-related community projects.

Etape Suisse already run a similar event in another Swiss outdoors playground, Davos, which is in its second successful year.

Robert Simpson, one of the Etape's founders, said: "We wanted to create sportives that are that bit different and better than everything else."

"Our events are special because they combine luxury accommodation and gourmet dining with superb cycling."

"And they are all-inclusive because they can be ridden on pedal bikes and power-assisted e-bikes. In addition, we raise valuable funds for a very worthwhile charity, Laureus."

Certainly, this style of cycling event is like nothing I have ever experienced. The usual pre-event

pasta party is replaced by a five-star dining experience at the Palace.

Pot-holed roads are exchanged for mile after consistent mile of silky Tarmac.

While there are some long climbs via classic cols (mountain passes), the gradients are rarely daunting and the views are rewardingly breath-taking.

When I reach a shorter and steeper ascent, I simply engage my easiest gear and dig in for, at most, a few hundred metres.

Other ingenious luxury sportive "alternatives" include the slick service and delicious dining of Swiss cafés and Alpine lodges, instead of the usual sportive "food stations". And a spa and gala evening as a swap for a post-event curry and beer.

The sportive weekend will conclude with an auction supporting Laureus.

Of course, there is a place for all styles of sportive events but if you are looking for something a lot more decadent, a weekend in Switzerland could be just the ticket.

Stephen Fryer, another founding member, said: "Our aim is to raise as much money as we can for our chosen charity partner but also to have a lot of fun doing it."

"It's going to be a great event for cyclists of all abilities, their partners, business colleagues and anyone who simply loves to be on their bike in the best of locations."

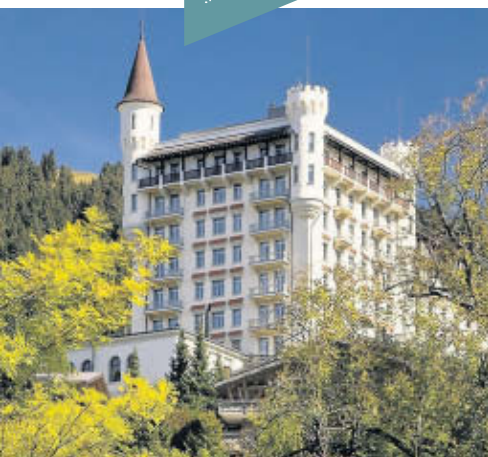
"I can't think of anything better than cycling combined with a few days staying in a luxurious hotel and eating amazing food."

I can't disagree. Not a bit.

## Travel info

- Swiss Air ([www.swissair.com](http://www.swissair.com)) for flights.
- To enter the Etape Suisse Gstaad sportive, visit [www.etapesuisse.com](http://www.etapesuisse.com)
- Gstaad Palace for accommodation and food, [www.palace.ch](http://www.palace.ch)
- Hotel Alpine Lodge for lunch, [alpinelodge.ch/en/](http://alpinelodge.ch/en/)

**ALPINE DELIGHT**  
Picture-postcard idyll of Bernese Oberland



**MAGNIFICENT** Impressive sight of Gstaad Palace



**SCENIC ROUTE** Taking in wonderful views



**TAKE A PEAK** Amazing Swiss Alps sunset



*"Unique combination of luxurious accommodation, gourmet dining and two stunning sportive courses"*