

THE Valais region of south-west Switzerland, 90 minutes from Geneva, has more than its fair share of geographical charms. For a start it has more high peaks than any other Alpine region, nearly 50 above 13,000ft. Then, clinging to the lower slopes, extensive vineyards produce a third of the country's wine – dark Pinot Noir and crisp Fendant. It's also home to the Four Valleys, Switzerland's largest linked ski region, with 260 miles of ski runs.

Verbier is the main draw but charming, low-key villages share the same slopes where lunch won't cost you a week's wage and buying property as a foreigner is far easier.

TOP-DOLLAR VERBIER 5,000FT

The undisputed star of the Four Valleys, glitzy Verbier is a serious skiers' resort with adrenalin-fuelled off-piste runs. After dark, it turns into one of the Alps' prime party towns.

Buying property as a foreigner in Verbier is difficult, and not just because of exorbitant prices – up to £2,000 per sq ft. Few permits are available for non-Swiss buyers but Cordée des Alpes, a redevelopment of an existing apartment building close to the town centre, has them in place. By December this will be a five-star hotel and spa with 14 luxury apartments. Eleven sold off-plan last year and the last four-bedroom penthouses start from a jaw-dropping £4.5 million through Alpine Homes.

The apartments feature 200-year-old reclaimed wood, wonderful south-facing mountain views and Kelly Hoppen design. Developer Marcus Bratter is a 54-year-old former Australian ski champion who arrived in Verbier 35 years ago, working his way up from dishwasher to become the town's biggest hotelier and owner of The Farm Club. He has watched Verbier become one of Switzerland's most expensive resorts, yet says the views and exceptional skiing are still the main appeal.

"Verbier is a special place and like all special places – St Tropez or Ibiza for example – it attracts the wealthiest people," says Bratter, explaining the sky-high prices.

PURPOSE-BUILT NENDAZ 4,600FT

North-facing Nendaz is a more affordable, family-friendly choice where permits are far easier to obtain. This large purpose-built resort is in the centre of the Four Valleys with more intermediate slopes than hard core Verbier. Alpine Homes have three-bedroom ski-in resale property from £579,200 as well as impressive new two-bedroom apartments at Mer de Glace for £408,870.

"Nendaz is the largest Four Valley resort with excellent sports facilities and prices considerably lower than Verbier,"



Sublime Switzerland at its peak

Glitzy Verbier may be the main ski attraction, but low-key villages share the same slopes and offer amazing Alpine value, says **Cathy Hawker**



'We see a cosmopolitan mix of visitors'

THIS is the tenth season that Toby Mallock will spend teaching skiers on the slopes of Verbier.

As the co-owner of Performance Verbier he knows the resort better than most and recently bought a converted cow barn in Le Chable, a gondola ride below the town.

"Verbier has an astonishing pull," says Toby, 35. "It has the most sunshine of any Alpine resort, fabulous après-ski and you can't fault the off-piste skiing."

With a passion for active, outdoor living, Toby takes full benefit of life in

the Alps, hiking and biking in summer as well as waterskiing on Lake Geneva. When the snow melts he works as a photographer and IT specialist, the job he had in the City before he left London.

"Verbier has changed enormously in 10 years," adds Toby. "It is twice as big but building regulations have kept its old style. It has a reputation for being too English but it is exceptionally international. We see a cosmopolitan mix of clients visiting the ski school."

Living it up in the Alps: Toby Mallock is the co-owner of Performance Verbier

■ **Performance Verbier:** 020 8144 2014; performanceverbier.com

GOOD-VALUE VEYSONNAZ 4,600FT

Prices are even lower in Veysonnaz at the furthest end of the Four Valleys, averaging £613 per sq ft.

This is a charming, traditional village of cobbled streets and dark wood chalets connected to Verbier's ski area by a high-speed lift.

There are shops and restaurants but a far smaller range than in Nendaz.

Expect to pay from £333,910 for a 15-year-old two-bedroom apartment and around £578,550 for a newer three-bedroom apartment.

Alpine Homes has off-plan three- and four-bedroom chalets with starting prices of £681,450 for 1,450sq ft available either in the village or beside the tree-lined slopes. Murray claims a similar on-piste property in Verbier could reach £6.8 million.

From £681,450: Le Hameau du Ciel. Final phase of ski-in and out off-plan chalets on the piste at Veysonnaz. Alpine Homes through Savills

CHOCOLATE-BOX GRIMENTZ 5,150FT

Two hours from Geneva, still in the Valais but in the separate ski area of Val d'Anniviers, south-facing Grimentz is a chocolate-box 15th-century village.

It has 40 miles of slopes which would double if plans to link to neighbouring Zinal go ahead. Chalets d'Aleide are 13 off-plan homes at the top of Grimentz overlooking the piste. Prices range from £408,870 for one-bedroom apartments to £3.5 million for five-bedroom chalets through Alpine Homes.

Mark Warner Properties is selling nine off-plan chalets at Hameau de Roua. The four- to six-bedroom homes start from £1.2 million and can be tailored to the owner's internal specifications.

■ **Alpine Homes:** through Savills, 020 7016 3740; savills.com/abroad

■ **Investors in Property:** 020 8905 5511; investorsinproperty.com

■ **Mark Warner Property:** 020 7692 0786; markwarnerproperty.com



£630,340: a four-bedroom villa in Les Collons, which shares the Verbier slopes. Investors in Property (020 8905 5511)



£630,340: a three-bedroom apartment built just five years ago in Nendaz offers good value. Available from Alpine Homes through Savills (020 7016 3740)



£1.2 million: customised villas in Grimentz, with up to six bedrooms, for sale through Mark Warner (020 7692 0786)