

## Hidden gem in the Swiss Alps - Jane Peel, St Luc

Monday January 25, 2016 -



**There are hundreds of ski areas in Switzerland, from the very small to the very big. The temptation to head to famous resorts means you could be missing out on a real gem.**

St Luc-Chandolin.

Heard of it?

Been there?

If so, you'll know what a beautiful, unspoilt place it is. And you'll even now be wishing we'd shut up and keep it a secret.

Sorry, it's too good to ignore.



*Beautiful*

St Luc and Chandolin are, in fact, two picturesque villages a few kilometres apart in the Val d'Anniviers in the Valais region of south-west Switzerland.

The pistes linking the two villages are long, winding and quiet.

Outside the holidays and weekends it's possible to go from top to bottom and not see another soul.

It means there's scope for some serious piste-blasting.

The only real drag is, well, the drags.

There are lots of them, although there is now a fast new chairlift, improving access between the two villages.

The lifts serve pistes from 3000m down to 1650m, with many of the lower altitude runs taking you through the trees.



*Empty pistes and  
trees*

An energetic skier or boarder can cover most of the groomed trails in a day, so it's obviously not the biggest resort.

But a Val d'Anniviers lift pass will give you access to a total of 220km of runs, covering Grimentz-Zinal and Vercorin on the other side of the valley.

Add to that, the prospect of some extensive, untouched off-piste opportunities which, unfortunately, PlanetSKI didn't get to try out this time, and you'll see why the area is enticing.



*Martin Hannart*

Our guide for a day's skiing in St Luc-Chandolin was Martin Hannart, marketing manager of the lift company.

He told PlanetSKI that the majority of visitors - around 60 per cent - are Swiss. Then come the Belgians and Dutch, followed by roughly equal numbers of French and Germans.

The British, he said, make up the rest, but the numbers are tiny.

Yet it was the British who came here in their droves in the second half of the 19th century, not to ski, but to hike in the summer and breathe the clean mountain air.



*Hotel Bella Tola*

The Bella Tola Hotel in St Luc was established in 1859 and was a popular haunt of the Brits back then.

The current owners, the very glamorous Anne-Françoise Buchs-Favre and her husband, Claude, have renovated it, keeping its original style.



*Anne-Francoise*

*Buchs-Favre*

It's well worth following the trail of those early hikers from the Bella Tola up the mountain to spend a night at the Hotel Weisshorn.



*Hotel Weisshorn*

Perched at 2337 metres above St Luc, it's been here since 1882.

It can best be described as a combination of rustic chic and faded grandeur.

Expect to share the WC and shower facilities with the rest of the guests on your floor.

There's no ski lift to get you to the hotel, which is part of its attraction.

So we walked - all the way up from the village.



*Spot the hotel*

In the winter, you can get there by ski touring or, as we did, in snowshoes, known in these parts as raquettes.



*An unexpected  
pleasure*

Now, normally, we at PlanetSKI would resent doing anything other than skiing on a beautiful, sunny day in the mountains, but the snowshoe trek turned out to be an unexpected pleasure.

Our route up from St Luc was 6km long, and climbed 752m.



*Pascale leads  
the way*

Pascale Haegler, a mountain rescuer and guide who operates tours through her company, Swiss Alpine Emotion, took it easy for us.

But it was thirsty work.



*Thirsty work*

Fortunately, we didn't have to carry our own lunch.

After climbing for two and a half hours, we found Pierre from the local tourist office waiting for us outside a cowshed.

He'd prepared a fondue, to serve with some naturally-chilled local white wine, which proved to be yet another unexpected pleasure.

The Swiss don't export their exceptionally good wines.

They keep them to themselves.



*Lunch outside  
the cowshed*



*Fondue al fresco*



The highlight of the trip, however, was not the Valais wine and cheese, but the next morning's pre-dawn snowshoe excursion through light powder to watch the sun come up.



*Before dawn*

Setting out from the hotel in the dark it was a magical experience.

The mountain was silent, except for the noise of our raquettes pressing on the snow.



*Sunrise trek*

Now, I should perhaps make clear that this whole trip had been promoted by Switzerland Tourism as a "romantic" trip for couples.

PlanetSKI was among a small group of journalists who'd been invited to bring their partners along.

I have never felt the slightest bit romantic in the company of a gaggle of cynical hacks, but, finally, at the top of this mountain at sunrise, it was possible - just for a moment - to feel the romance.



*Feeling the  
romance*

The moment didn't last long.

We were hungry and cold, and more interested in getting back to the hotel for breakfast, before heading down the mountain by a different route.

After struggling downhill in the steep powder fields (definitely trickier than going uphill), there was one final "romantic" surprise for us.



*Forest picnic*

A picnic brunch in the forest was provided by Pascale's team at Swiss Alpine Emotion.



*A feast in  
paradise*

A feast of local food to send us on our way home to a damp, grey, England from this, our newly-discovered corner of paradise.

## **FACT BOX**

For more information on Switzerland visit [www.myswitzerland.com](http://www.myswitzerland.com)

**Swiss International Airlines** operate from London Heathrow, London City, London Gatwick (seasonal during winter), Birmingham, Manchester and Dublin from as little as £38 one-way\* (Economy Light Fare only includes hand luggage).

The all-inclusive fares start from £54 one-way\*, including all airport taxes, one piece hold luggage and free ski carriage. (\*Please note this is a leading fare and is subject to change, availability and may not be available on all flights. Terms and conditions apply.)

For reservations call 00345 990 9161 or visit: [www.swiss.com](http://www.swiss.com).

**Rail** For transport within Switzerland, the Swiss Travel System all-in-one ticket covers rail, bus and boat journeys. The Swiss Transfer Ticket provides a round-trip between the airport/Swiss border and your destination. Prices are £94 in 2nd class and £151 in first class. [www.swisstravelsystem.co.uk](http://www.swisstravelsystem.co.uk)

**4\* Hotel Bella Tola** Double room CHF108 to CHF215. Single room from CHF 136 to 170.

[www.bellatola.ch/index.cfm](http://www.bellatola.ch/index.cfm)

**Hotel Weisshorn** Standard double room from CHF280 to CHF 320. Superior double room from CHF320 to 360. Single room from CHF150 to CHF 170.

[www.weisshorn.ch/](http://www.weisshorn.ch/)

**St Luc-Chandolin lift pass** 1 day CHF54, 3 days CHF145, 7 days CHF 279

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**For the spirit of the mountains**