

Val Müstair – spherical

(Standard text)

Anyone coming over the Ofen Pass from the Engadine will find a piece of paradise that was thought lost. Here, at the south-easternmost tip of Switzerland, a wide valley about 20 kilometres long opens towards South Tyrol: the Val Müstair. Protected by high mountains, the Val Müstair in the border triangle between Switzerland, Austria and Italy has been able to retain its original character to this day. The mild, dry climate and the clean air favour a rich flora, which in its unique diversity provides a habitat for numerous rare animal species: The Biosfera Val Müstair Regional Nature Park covers the entire valley and borders the Swiss National Park and the Stelvio National Park in the «three-park corner». As the only main valley in Switzerland without power lines, the Val Müstair is a real insider tip for nature lovers, sports enthusiasts and those seeking peace and quiet: The unspoilt, timeless landscape invites you in winter and summer to experience nature far away from the hustle and bustle – whether on (touring) skis, on foot or by bike. As part of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Engiadina Val Müstair and with the UNESCO World Heritage Site Monastery of St. John in Müstair, the Val Müstair also carries two UNESCO labels. In addition, the almost 1500 inhabitants of the six villages Tschierv, Lü, Fuldera, Valchava, Sta. Maria and Müstair provide the unique atmosphere in the valley with their language, the lively Jauer culture and hospitality. Places like Val Müstair are today a precious rarity: original, close to nature, multi-faceted – and anything but unworldly.

Spherical Val Müstair: unique bio-, atmosphere and cultural sphere

Biosphere

Unique valley – unique climate

The original, unspoilt natural and cultural landscape of the Val Müstair extends over almost 200 square kilometres between the Ofen Pass and South Tyrol, the Engadine and the Italian Vinschgau Valley. The sun-drenched high valley in the border triangle between Switzerland, Austria and Italy is also situated in a «three-park corner»: the Val Müstair is the transition zone between the protected areas of the Swiss National Park and the Stelvio National Park and boasts its own unmistakable flora and fauna. Thanks to its geographical location on the southern slope of the Alps and the opening of the valley towards South Tyrol, the Val Müstair has its own remarkably mild climate. The timberline is at 2300 metres above sea level, and since the high, nearby mountain ranges keep wind and rain at bay, the valley also has calm air conditions and an above-average number of sunny days. For travellers in Val Müstair this means Great weather reliability in summer, sunny exposure in autumn, stable snow conditions in winter.

Nature worth protecting with UNESCO label - Biosfera Val Müstair Nature Park

The favourable climatic situation of the Val Müstair ensures a lavish abundance of alpine plant species, often threatened or already extinct elsewhere in Switzerland, on the valley's mats and mountain meadows. The village of Lü and its surroundings are considered an insider tip among botanists and plant lovers: rare orchid species, brown root plants and medicinal plants still thrive there. Not least because of its proximity to the Swiss National Park, deer in particular are frequent visitors to the valley. Bearded vultures, roe deer, chamois, ibex and marmots have also found a home in the Val Müstair alongside rare or endangered species such as the rock butterfly, asp viper and green lizard. Such diversity needs to be protected. In 2011, the Val Müstair was recognised by the

federal government as a Regional Nature Park. In 2017, UNESCO officially declared the nature park, together with the Swiss National Park and parts of the Lower Engadine municipality of Scuol, to be the 448 square kilometre UNESCO biosphere reserve Engiadina Val Müstair. It is not by chance that nature as a reason for a trip to Val Müstair scored significantly better (+ 6 %) than the entire Swiss mountain region in the 2017 survey by the Tourism Monitor Switzerland.

Gentle organic farming – man and nature in harmony

In Val Müstair, the commitment to a good coexistence of nature and culture is not only limited to the various projects for the preservation of species and habitat diversity in the Biosfera Val Müstair Nature Park. Agriculture and forestry in Switzerland's first high-alpine UNESCO biosphere reserve also focus on the needs of nature. For example, 80 % of the farmers in Val Müstair produce purely organically. In addition, numerous associations and institutions in the region bear witness to the respectful and sustainable treatment of the environment: the «Agricultura Val Müstair» stands for high-quality organic products from the Biosfera Val Müstair nature reserve. Under the sponsorship of Agricultura Val Müstair GmbH, 27 farmers have joined forces with the nature park and the Turettas Hunters' Association: instead of silage fodder, the participating dairy farmers rely on hay feeding. Grain farming is also an increasingly important branch of business in the valley. The «Gran Alpin» cooperative of organic mountain farmers in Graubünden also sells the cereals grown in the Val Müstair, including the naked oats grown exclusively in the Val Müstair. In addition, the woodland in the valley, which is characterised by spruce, larch, Swiss stone pine and Scots pine, bears witness to responsible management of the forestry industry, which is important for the region. The interplay between ecology and economy not only protects the unique natural landscape of the valley, but also guarantees the local population a long-term basis for life.

This is how the Val Müstair tastes – a culinary heritage managed in a sustainable way

The diversity and careful treatment of the flora and fauna of the Val Müstair is also reflected in the unmistakable taste of the region's culinary products. Selected organic specialities of the Val Müstair are now known far beyond the valley boundaries: The Grisons pear or mountain rye bread of the Meier-beck, the fitness salsiz of farmer Isidor Sepp, the Grisons mountain cheese of the Chascharia Val Müstair or the alpine honey of the dark bee. Some of these are also listed in the inventory of the culinary heritage of Switzerland. And many of them contain at least 80 percent regional and sustainably produced ingredients. Because only then, and only if an additional two-thirds of the added value is generated in the region, are the food products awarded the product label of the nature park, which carries the «regio.garantie» seal of quality. But even if organic products or the fitness bars from Meier-beck in Val Müstair today carry the «Jauer Power» to the whole of Switzerland, some specialities from the region are also available exclusively in the region: for example the fresh goat cheese balls from the organic farmer family Hartmann from Guad, which are only available to taste in the summer months and only in Val Müstair.

Leading the way in sustainability

Surrounded by intact nature, Rhaeto-Romanic traditions and tourism-driven value creation - the Lower Engadine attaches great importance to maintaining its livelihood for future generations. Sustainability is nothing new for the holiday region. For many years, various businesses and the entire region have been focusing on a development that harmonises the three pillars of ecology, economy and social issues. It is therefore not surprising that the Lower Engadine regularly plays a pioneering role in sustainable awards. It was the first in Switzerland to achieve certification with TourCert as a «Nachhaltiges Reiseziel» in 2022. One year later, it succeeded in being awarded the highest possible "Level III - leading" as a Swisustainable Destination - again in the pioneering role. The labels and classifications testify to the sustainability measures implemented in the region. Various representatives of tourism stakeholders founded a sustainability council in 2021, which initiates regional projects and regularly consults on local development. The strength of the region is based on a large number of businesses that have committed themselves to sustainability and make it tangible for their guests.

Atmosphere

Peace, nature and hospitality – a place for every season

Like agriculture, tourism in the Val Müstair is also level-headed and unobtrusive. The seclusion, the peace and quiet as well as the unspoilt natural and cultural landscape of the valley – there are no high-voltage power lines in the entire valley – ensure timeless views and active relaxation for body and soul away from mass tourism. Thanks to reliable post bus connections, the Val Müstair is easily accessible all year round. The high valley attracts visitors with stable weather conditions in summer, autumn and winter, lots of sunshine and little rain – and thanks to the low light pollution and clean air, the starry sky in the valley also seems close enough to touch. However, the sociability and hospitality of the valley inhabitants contrast with the rough, lonely expanses of the primeval Alpine valley. Anyone who has been here once, will gladly come back (see Tourism Monitor Switzerland 2017 survey).

Small but nice – winter sports in the home of the Olympic champion

Like its neighbour Engadin, the Val Müstair is a real cross-country skiing paradise: Four cross-country trails, 28 kilometres and a literally breathtaking altitude profile from the lowest point in Valchava (1440 m above sea level) to the panoramic high-altitude trails in Lü (1920 m above sea level) and Minschuns (2170 m above sea level) await fans of long boards. Every two years, the home of the Olympic and multiple world champion Dario Cologna is also gripped by cross-country skiing fever during the «FIS Tour de Ski». The World Cup race is one of the most important sporting events in Switzerland and the exuberant atmosphere at the famous sprint track in Tschierv is hard to beat. But skiers, snowboarders and freeriders also get their money's worth in Val Müstair: In the Minschuns winter sports area, not far from the Ofen Pass, four ski lifts and 25 kilometres of pistes at an altitude of 1670 metres above sea level await young and old alike. You can glide up to an altitude of 2700 metres with practically no waiting time, and then carve your way down into the valley through the deep snow or on well-groomed pistes. The manageable winter sports area is also ideal for families with children. Those who prefer to enjoy the winter panorama in the Val Müstair sitting on a sledge, whizz down the toboggan run from the sun terrace at Lü down to Tschierv.

Tracks in the snow – gentle winter experiences in the great outdoors

Thanks to its climatically favourable location, the Val Müstair enjoys a large amount of natural snow in winter. Skiers, snowboarders and cross-country skiers enjoy this on rapid descents in the Minschuns snow sports area or on the four cross-country ski runs in the valley. But things are also quieter and more leisurely in the Val Müstair: time seems to stand still when you go on winter or snowshoe hikes through the snow-covered larch and Swiss stone pine forests and picturesque mountain villages of the valley. On the way from Minschuns or Tschierv via Alp Champatsch to Lü or from Sta. Maria to Fuldera the winter magic unfolds its full power. Game can also be easily observed here in the snow-damped solitude of the alpine winter. The Minschuns winter sports area is also the ideal starting point for ski tours in the surrounding area: the surrounding mountains are mostly over 3000 metres high, but tend to slope gently, which is why practically every peak can be climbed on skis. This means that touring enthusiasts can also make their mark in the unique nature park area. Another winter highlight of a special kind is a snowshoe tour in the lonely expanses of the mystical Val Mora – Canada sends its regards.

From Alpine summer to «Indian summer» – on the way in a hiking paradise

The sun-drenched Val Müstair in the south-easternmost Grisons is an El Dorado for hiking and nature enthusiasts: mild temperatures, deep blue skies and the alpine topography encourage you to take off for sporty high flights and refreshing hikes in the great outdoors. 250 kilometres of hiking trails lead through the unspoilt landscape of the Biosfera Val Müstair Nature Park. Here, on the border to Switzerland's only national park, the intact natural and cultural landscape of the valley plays all its trump cards: The splashing Rombach, the cool pine and larch forests, flowering pastures and picturesque mountain lakes such as the Lai da Rims, as well as the rich Alpine flora and fauna invite you to explore the mountains and valley on your own. A unique experience is also a hike along the

Auats, the historic irrigation systems of the Val Müstair. From leisurely walks to mountain hikes and mountain bike tours to the surrounding two and three thousand metre peaks, everything is possible. In summer, too, a trip into the deserted Val Mora is one of the highlights: whether on foot, by bike or on horseback. So if you want to experience a typical «Indian summer» and untouched expanses, you don't have to travel all the way to Canada.

Cultural sphere

Not «only» pure nature – the rich cultural landscape of Val Müstair

The unspoilt nature, the tranquillity as well as the hospitality of the valley inhabitants are among the main reasons why tourists come to Val Müstair. This is also confirmed by the survey results of the Tourism Monitor Switzerland. But the valley not only offers impressive scenery and numerous sports and leisure activities. Culture and tradition are also cherished by the local population: From traditional customs such as the «Chalandamarz» at the end of winter or the harvest festival «Festa da la racolta» in Valchava to Rhaeto-Romanic and its literature, museums and the UNESCO World Heritage Site St. Johann Monastery, the rich culture in Val Müstair is alive – and lived. Sometimes the natural and cultural landscape merge in one place in the Val Müstair: around the Ofenpass, for example, are the walled ruins of the smelting furnaces that used to process iron ore from the surrounding mines near the pass: «Il Fuorn» owes its current name to them. The ruins of the former fortifications from the First World War and the Alpini village known as «Italian Machu Picchu» also make it possible to experience a piece of (border) history in the middle of the high mountains.

Language as a cultural asset – Romansh as a door opener to the world of Jauer

Language, they say, is the key to foreign cultures. The majority of the valley population in the Val Müstair still speaks the Rhaeto-Romanic dialect Jauer, thus preserving this valuable cultural asset, which is powerfully expressed in local literature, music, sagas and customs, house inscriptions and also in place names such as Tschier (in English «stag»). Less than one percent of the Swiss population speaks the fourth national language, but some 35,000 people in the canton of Grisons speak one of the five official idioms of Romansh. As in neighbouring Lower Engadin, the idiom Vallader is written in Val Müstair. However, in Val Müstair, people usually converse orally in the dialect of the valley, the Jauer dialect – the same name is also used for the valley inhabitants themselves. Although «ils Jauers» also speak German, in order to really immerse yourself in the Jauer culture and the associated customs and traditions of the Val Müstair, it helps to become familiar with the language. One way of getting closer to the melodies and the cultural treasures of Rhaeto-Romanic hidden within them is to take part in the intensive language courses offered by the «Lia Rumantscha» in Sta. Maria.

Cultural sites – where art and history can be experienced

Culture happens in Val Müstair in very different places. The cultural figurehead of the valley is the Benedictine monastery of St. John in Müstair, which gave the Val Müstair its name (from Latin «monasterium»). The monastery, which according to legend was founded in 775 by Charlemagne, King of the Franks, was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1983. There are also numerous other meeting places in the valley for artists and people interested in art. Locals and guests meet at literary, musical and film events, lectures and open discussion groups, for example at the «Chasa Jaura» cultural forum in Valchava or the «Chastè de Cultura» in Fuldera. Various museums also offer exciting insights into the eventful history of the valley. However, customs and traditions in Val Müstair are by no means only museum-like. In addition to the modern installations by the artist Pascal Lampert or the products of Tessanda, one of the last hand weaving mills in Switzerland, the works of numerous other artists also bear witness to the high value of the – traditional and contemporary – culture in the valley and the diversity and openness with which it is lived.

Living everyday culture – where houses breathe history

The rich history and culture of the Val Müstair has long been discovered not only in museums. It is reflected in the sgraffito carvings and inscriptions of the typical Graubünden houses, it lives on in traditional customs such as the «Chalandamarz» or the «Festa da Racolta» harvest festival, and outlasts time in the medieval Swiss stone pine rooms and soot-blackened kitchens of the oldest hotels on the square. Often their owners are as unique as the houses themselves and take travellers back in time with their anecdotes of famous guests and legendary tales. With their personality, their stories and their hospitality they contribute a lot to the fact that many guests do not stop at a one-off visit to the valley. So instead of a final farewell, they often say on departure: A revair in Val Müstair.

Media contacts

Bernhard Aeschbacher
Co-Director TESSVM
Tel. +41 81 861 88 32
b.aeschbacher@engadin.com

Claudio Daguati
Co-Director TESSVM
Tel. +41 81 861 88 43
c.daguati@engadin.com

Roger Kreienbühl
Media, Corporate Communications and Brand
Tel. +41 81 861 88 38
r.kreienbuehl@engadin.com

About the TESSVM

TESSVM is the tourist marketing organization for the Lower Engadin, Samnaun and Val Müstair. On behalf of the shareholders, TESSVM primarily promotes the demand for tourist offers and services both nationally and internationally. Together with all local stakeholders, the TESSVM is responsible for the communication of offers and guest care in five political communities with over 20 vacation resorts. The organization with its headquarters in Scuol launches and coordinates joint projects with regional partners and service providers and ensures coordination with Graubünden Ferien and Switzerland Tourism. With a budget of approximately 5.5 million Swiss francs, the company employs around 40 full- and part-time staff, including one intern and three apprentices. The Engadin Samnaun Val Müstair vacation region contributes around 1 million overnight stays and thus almost 10 percent of the total number of overnight stays in Graubünden.

Taking responsibility: CSR and three-dimensional sustainability

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is the voluntary contribution of companies to sustainable development, with voluntary self-commitment at its core. In doing so, TESSVM acts according to the principle of three-dimensional sustainability: economic, social and environmental. TESSVM measures all the CO2 emissions it generates and strives to reduce them. The unavoidable emissions are offset by carbon offset projects from myclimate. Purchases are made in the region wherever possible and contracts are awarded to local partners. Within the company itself, TESSVM promotes young talent with apprenticeships and internships.