Let it Snow!

During the coronavirus pandemic, it is especially important for our physical and mental well-being to get out and get fresh air and sunshine. The extended lockdown causes us to be more housebound, and the lack of direct sunlight can cause deficiencies of vitamin D, which is an important factor for good health and a strong immune system.

Although local sports facilities, gyms, fitness centers, swimming pools, and even outdoor skating rinks are currently closed, we are lucky here in Switzerland because the entire country is one giant outdoor playground, and when there is snow on the ground, the possibilities are limitless! January and February are the best months for winter sports, because the snow cover can even reach down in the valleys. In general, although it varies from year to year, snow cover is very good at altitudes of 1500 m and above, where many of the winter sports resorts are located. Starting in March and April, you may have to go higher to find good snow coverage.

Also important this year, the tourism trade associations have launched a "Clean & Safe" label, which lets guests know that they are visiting an establishment that has consciously committed to complying with the safety concepts (**www.clean-and-safe.ch**).

This Winter Special provides suggestions for winter activities that you can enjoy with your family, whether you like skiing or not. So bundle up and enjoy the breathtaking sights of the pristine winterscapes that this region has to offer!

Winter Hiking

Winter hiking is something that just about anyone can do, even families with young children in an all-terrain stroller or sled. It doesn't require any specialized equipment or training, just the desire to get out and enjoy the fresh air and gorgeous snow-covered landscapes.

What You Will Need: It is recommended to hike with warm winter boots with a sturdy treading. Also recommended are a hat, mittens or gloves, sunglasses (or goggles), sunscreen, tissues, a water bottle or thermos of warm drink, high-energy snacks in a small backpack, and a fully charged cell phone. Some also like to hike with trekking poles, which can increase stability and balance in tricky spots, alleviate some of the strain on the lower back and legs, as well as be used as a tool for a variety of tasks like checking snow depth.

Difficulty Level: Winter hiking trails are designated with three different difficulty levels: "Easy" is for trails up to 5 km and an elevation gain of no more than 200 m; "Medium" is for trails from 5–12 km and/or with an elevation gain of up to 500 m; and "Difficult" is for trails that are longer than 12 km and/or with more than 500 m of elevation gain. The hiking time for each trail is indicated in hours and minutes and is generally calculated as 25% more than the time for summer hikes on the same trails.

Where to Go: There are about 1,052 marked winter hikes for you to discover in Switzerland. They are designated by pink signs with a hiker pictogram on them and a route number, although they may also contain additional signalization with a route field.

Many of Switzerland's winter resorts groom trails in winter so that you can enjoy a leisurely winter walk without the need for snowshoes. This also allows families with varying interests to engage in different winter sports in the same location. There are also many blogs with great suggestions for beautiful winter hikes, including numerous family-friendly trails.. Additionally, many of the winter-sports regions (eg, Interlaken, Gstaad, Jungfrau) post their local winter hikes on their own tourism websites. If you would like to get a list of winter hiking trails around Switzerland, here are a couple of great sites that you can visit:

- ***SwitzerlandMobility*** is an official site that lists winter hiking trails by region; simply type in your region of interest for a list of those in that area. You can also click on "Selected winter hikes" to pick from hikes in Swiss parks, winter hiking loop trails (where you conveniently start and end in the same place), as well as hikes that are new to the 20/21 season. By clicking on the hike, you will receive information about length, ascent, time, and difficulty level. You can download the app to take the info with you or print out the corresponding maps before departure. **www.schweizmobil.ch/en/winter-hiking.html**
- ***My Switzerland*** lists 151 winter hikes around Switzerland with information on length, duration, and ascent of the trail. There is a brief description of the hike in English, in addition to start and end locations for your planning. If you click on the map for each hike, you will be provided with the one issued by SwitzerlandMobility. **www.myswitzerland.com/en-ch/experiences/winter/snowshoe-and-winter-hiking/winter-hiking-search/winterhiking/**

Safety Tips for Winter Hikers:

- Follow the signposting and signalization.
- Do not leave the marked trails.
- Keep up to date on the latest information (operating times, closures due to avalanche risk, lack of snow, weather conditions).
- If in doubt, turn back—especially in bad visibility.
- Only hike winter hiking trails during daylight hours (no nocturnal or twilight hikes for safety and wildlife protection reasons).
- Make sure you are suitably equipped for your intended activity.

Tobogganing

Originally used as a mode of transport for hay and wood in the Alps, tobogganing as a sport was started by English tourists vacationing in St. Moritz in 1872. The first official tobogganing race was held in Davos in 1881, although at that time, women and children were not permitted to participate for "safety reasons." Tobogganing ("schlitteln" in German), sledding, sledging, or whatever you call it, is great winter fun. What could be better than sliding down snow-covered hills surrounded by gorgeous scenery? It is getting more popular every year, with over 180 tobogganing runs in Switzerland, making for fabulous days of family fun in winter. And best of all, this most enjoyable of family pursuits is easy to take up.

What You Will Need: Everyone should wear a helmet, good gloves, ski goggles, and good footwear, such as boots with spikes as a brake aid or at least with a good profile. You will also need a toboggan, of course, which can be purchased at a sports store or flea market or rented at the larger resorts. The classic wood-constructed Swiss sled (the "Davos"), which you steer and brake with your feet, is great for a parent and child, as it can accommodate two people. However, kids tend to prefer the plastic variety with a steering wheel and brake. If you want to travel light, the plastic "saucers" are effective and inexpensive alternatives to full-blown toboggans.

Where to Go: If there is snow in Basel, the choices are many. The park at Margarethen is great for the younger kids, as are some of the hills in Bruderholz, such as the field at Hechtliacker or by the water tower. Chrischona, with its elevation above Bettingen, is always a favorite. About 25 minutes from Basel, hilly Gempen usually has snow—but be careful where you park, or your souvenirs will include a parking ticket! Going a little further afield, the Chöpfli in Gelterkinden (30 minutes from Basel) and Waldweid in Waldenburg (about 40 minutes from Basel) are also popular choices. Also 40 minutes from Basel, Langenbruck has a small ski lift perfect for beginners, and all the hills near the lift are used by families for sledding. In the Jura, the lift-served toboggan run closest to Basel is at Wasserfallen, approximately 40 minutes from the city. You can get there by bus, taking the number 70 from Aeschenplatz to Reigoldswil, from where a gondola takes you to the top. You can also rent toboggans there for CHF 9 for adults and CHF 5.40 for kids.

Of course, some of the best toboggan runs are in the Alps, and over 100 resorts have lift-served runs with toboggan hire in the resort. From Basel, the closest ones are in Engelberg, Klewenalp, Sörenberg, and Melchsee-Frutt. Also easy to get to is Meiringen, where you can take a bus from Schwarzwaldalp to Grosse Scheidegg for a 5-km run with a 500-meter descent (check the bus schedule at **www.grindelwaldbus.ch**). A particular favorite is the Bussalp in Grindelwald, which offers four different toboggan runs ranging from 4.5–12.5 km long. Just before reaching Grindelwald, there are several parking lots with free shuttle buses into town (or take the train to Grindelwald). From the train station in Grindelwald, you can take the bus up to Bussalp and then toboggan back down to Grindelwald. If you want to make it a weekend break or longer and go sledding, some of the most beautiful Alpine resorts offer great lift-served runs and plenty of other diversions in addition to the slopes. Scuol, St. Moritz, Klosters, and Arosa are great for a wide selection of winter activities, including tobogganing and skiing, and they can all be reached by train. Many people also come from all over Europe just to toboggan the 6-km run from Preda to Bergün that twists and turns dramatically through tunnels and below viaducts in the Albula valley. To get to the start of the run, you take the UNESCO World Heritage section of the Rhaetian Railway line, before setting off on one of the most remarkable Alpine experiences.

Tobogganing Safety: From a statistical point of view, sledding accounts for one in three winter sports-related accidents. Roughly 7,000 people are injured in sledding accidents each winter. While most of the injured suffer sprains and bruises, an unfortunate number also suffer severe injuries to the head and chest area. Why do so many accidents happen on the toboggan runs? Unlike skiers, tobogganers rarely wear helmets; however, collisions with obstacles such as trees or hikers are at least as common as when skiing. In addition, modern sleds can reach speeds of up to 50 km/hour, making them very difficult to control, particularly for children, high-spirited teens, and even inexperienced adults. Children should only be allowed to toboggan alone if they can safely steer and brake, and definitely not those younger than age 6—remember, the lower the body weight, the harder it is to stop the sled. Sledding with a baby is often a bad idea as no matter how bundled up they are, they are most susceptible to injury, which is normally caused by the impact of their own parents during a crash. Besides, babies generally prefer being pulled on a toboggan through the forest or countryside. While the risk of injury should never deter anyone from participating in this fun and timeless winter activity, the right equipment and safety measures are paramount to coming back from a fun day of sledding safely!

In Case of Emergency: In the event of a sledding accident—if someone crashes or if two sleds collide—immediately clear the run. If this is not possible, block the area; for example, by placing a sled upright 5–10 meters above the accident site and hanging from it a visible jacket or scarf as a warning. Check the condition of the injured person and call for help. Dial 144 for emergency; describe the situation, exact location, and symptoms; and stay with and care for the injured person until help arrives.

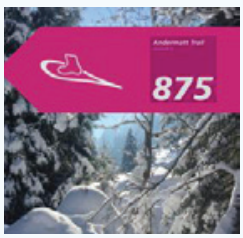
Safety Tips for Tobogganers:

- Don't be reckless—ensure that your actions are not dangerous to others.
- Don't go beyond your abilities.
- Never sled head first.
- Stay in your lane.
- Keep sufficient distance when passing.
- Glance behind/above you when preparing to start or stop.
- Only stop on the side of the lane and only where you can clearly be seen.
- Never walk in the lane, only beside the lane.
- Respect all signs and signals.
- Help others in the event of an accident.
- Warn hill operators of any accidents/problems.

Snowshoeing

Snowshoeing is a great winter sport that can be enjoyed as a family or with friends. It is terrific exercise in the fresh outdoors (burning over 600 calories per hour), and exposure to sunlight is a must in these uncertain times. Snowshoeing, or "Schneeschuhwandern," as it is called in this part of the world, has come a long way since the early days, when trappers used large wood-framed models stringed with animal hide and sinews to trudge through deep snow. Today's snowshoes are smaller, lighter, and made with modern materials and flexible bindings that are easy to strap on and off. Outfitting yourself for snowshoeing is much less expensive than for other winter sports, such as skiing and snowboarding, and the best part is that just about anyone who can walk can also snowshoe! So why not strap on some snowshoes this winter and discover this fabulous low-cost sport.

What You Will Need: You will of course need a pair of snowshoes. If you want to give snowshoeing a try before investing, consider renting them at any of the winter resorts or sports equipment stores. In addition to a pair of snowshoes, you will need clothes that are warm enough for the temperature and wind conditions; something water- and wind-proof is best. As you can build up a sweat while snowshoeing, layers that are easy to remove and a top that zippers are best to regulate body temperature. Wear a sturdy pair of waterproof hiking boots (if warm enough) or winter boots; make sure that the boots you wear are compatible with the bindings of your snowshoes before heading out on a long trail. Other items to bring include a hat, mittens or gloves, sunglasses (or goggles), tissues, a water bottle or thermos of warm drink, and high-energy snacks in a small backpack. Also recommended are a first aid kit, a survival blanket, sunscreen, flashlight, compass, map, and a fully charged cell phone. Some snowshoers like to use poles to increase stability and/or burn a few more calories due to the higher cardio workout from the constant arm movement—in this case, ski poles or other such poles that won't sink in the snow may be best.



Difficulty Levels: You can snowshoe in open areas or on designated routes (indicated by a pink snowshoe trail sign). Most winter sports resorts now offer marked and groomed trails for those who prefer snowshoeing to skiing. Marked routes are easier to follow, will not lead you into avalanche-prone areas, and protect the nature and the wildlife that live in the area and need to be respected.

When choosing a snowshoe excursion, consider the time/distance of the trail as well as the change in elevation. Snowshoeing is more tiring than hiking; therefore, it is important to bring enough provisions and to consider the time it will take to return as well as the number of hours of daylight to safely find your way back. Remember also that the return is often slower than the way out.

Marked trails are not necessarily groomed, so while they allow you to enjoy the snowy landscape, they also require some attention to signs and directions. The difficulty levels of marked snowshoe trails, like other snow sports, are designated by the colors blue (easy), red (medium), and black (difficult). Trails marked blue are for beginners, with easy ascents and descents but no difficult crossings or steep passages. Red trails are for snowshoers with some experience. They have moderately steep terrain with occasional steeper or exposed sections in the ascent, descent, or crossings, which require surefootedness and a tolerance for heights. Black trails are for experienced snowshoers only with partly steep and exposed terrain with risk of falling. They require good snowshoeing technique, surefootedness, a tolerance for heights, and a good physical condition. Some marked trails, such as those marked by the Schweizer Alpen-Club (SAC), indicate six levels of difficulty termed WT1 to WT6; this rating primarily reflects the slope, risk of falling, and risk of avalanches rather than the actual travel time or changes in elevation. Thus, some WT1 trails may be 5 hours long, whereas a WT6 trail may only take 2 hours.

If you are not an experienced snowshoer or if you are unfamiliar with the area, you may want to join a guided snowshoe tour. Most tourist offices or local tourism associations in winter sports destinations offer weekly guided snowshoe tours; contact them for a list of times and degree of difficulty. Note that during the pandemic, tour groups are restricted to five people.

Where to Snowshoe: Basically, you can snowshoe anywhere there is snow, short of trespassing on private property of course! The Basel area is not renowned for its abundance of the white stuff in winter, so you will most likely need to leave the city to enjoy this winter sport. Essentially, any trail that is considered a winter hiking trail (Winter-Wanderweg) is fair game, as long as the terrain is not too rocky, steep, or treacherous. Switzerland has a vast number of winter hiking trails as well as snowshoeing trails. The following information will help to get you started and find some snowshoe excursions that are right for you.

Baselland and surrounds are riddled with hiking trails, and when the snow is sufficient, these are good proximal options. Keep in mind, however, that when the hiking trails are well travelled and packed down, it may make more sense to hike them than to snowshoe them. For up-to-date information on snowshoeing in the Baselland region, you can go to their tourist information site (**www.baselland-tourismus.ch**) and search for the term "Schneeschuh." The SAC also offers guided snowshoe tours throughout Switzerland. For those in the Baselland region, go to **www.sac-baselland.ch/touren/**.

Wanderwege beider-Basel is a private organization that works closely with the organization Schweizer Wanderwege (Swiss Hiking Federation) to offer guided hiking tours in the Basel/Baselland region throughout the year. In winter, they also offer some snowshoeing tours. To register for one of their tours, visit their website at **www.wanderwege-beider-basel.ch/de/wandern-/gefuehrte-wanderungen** and download the 2021 program by clicking on "Jahresprogramm 2021."

Langenbruck in canton Baselland, with its snowy landscapes and an altitude of over 700 m, is only 30 minutes from Basel and therefore a popular destination for Basel families in winter. In particularly good snow conditions, there is a small ski lift in operation, as well as a popular children's lift for sledding.

The Wasserfallen region in Reigoldswil Baselland, with its peaceful snowy landscape, is only a 45-minute drive from Basel. In addition to their tobogganing run mentioned before, you can explore the area on snowshoes; a marked trail leads from the Wasserfallen mountain station to a quaint mountain restaurant (Vogelsberg); snowshoes and poles can be rented on the spot.

The neighboring canton of Jura with its unspoiled scenery and rolling hills is a paradise for snowshoers. You can download a PDF of some suggested trails with information on distance; difficulty; and amenities, such as parking, toilets, picnic areas, and restaurants, at **www.j3l.ch/en/Z10363/snowshoes?**.

Further afield, ***most major ski resorts in Switzerland*** have some designated snowshoeing trails as well as snowshoe rentals; so if you travel with a family or group whose other members want to ski/snowboard and you prefer trekking through the winter wonderland, these are good options.

If you are serious about snowshoeing, consider joining the ***"Schweizerischer Schneeschuh Verband"*** (Swiss Snowshoe Association) (**www.s-v-s.ch**). Membership costs CHF 40 per year and includes a book entitled "Passport-Raquettes" that provides tons of information on great marked snowshoe trails in each canton. Another organization called Global Trail has a great website that provides a list of marked trails in Switzerland, as well as the latest information, tips, and hints for safe and exciting snowshoeing. Go to their website **www.global-trail.ch/en/schnee-schuhlaufen.html** and click on "All snowshoe trails" to get an alphabetical list of over 100 trails, their status, difficulty level, distance, and estimated time to complete. Clicking on a listed trail will also give you a description of the trail, a corresponding map, and directions on how to get there with private and public transportation. If you want to book a guided snowshoe tour, click on "Tour operator" on the same site for a list of organizations that provide guided snowshoe excursions in the various mountain regions.

Swiss Alpine Guides offers various types of guided snowshoe adventures in the Interlaken area, including a "Sunset Gluhwein" snowshoe trek, a "Fun" snowshoe trek, and "Mountain hut" snowshoe trek. Learn more about how to book one of these adventures for groups, teams, or families on their website at **www.swissalpineguides.ch/english/SnowshoeTrek/default.html**.

The Chatel-St-Denis Les Paccots in canton Fribourg also offers a variety of snowshoeing experiences on their marked trails (some of them equipped with reflectors to allow for snowshoeing at night with a torch or headlamp). They even offer a combination of snowshoeing and sledding, as well as a fondue experience where you take a little portable cheese fondue set with you and then choose your preferred spot on the trail to sit down, unwrap your fondue kit, and have a unique picnic in the snow. For more information, go to **www.les-paccots.ch/en/Z9881/snowshoeing**.

In the Valais region, you can experience a delightful world of pristine winterscapes. Beautiful trails lead through forests, over wide snowfields, and along impressive 4000-meter peaks. To search for tours of different difficulty levels and durations from a dozen destinations, go to **www.valais.ch/en/activities/other-winter-activities/snowshoeing**.

Safety Tips for Snowshoers:

- Be sure to check the weather conditions before heading out.
- Never snowshoe alone.
- Leave behind an itinerary of where you are going and your expected return time.
- Choose a trail that is suitable for your level and give yourself ample time to return before losing daylight.
- If your tour/trail includes a gondola, be sure to check the time of the last ride down.
- Never snowshoe on or near train tracks, as the snow muffles the sound of oncoming trains.
- Avoid snowshoeing on private property and respect nature and its inhabitants.
- Leave dogs at home whenever possible. When dogs are permitted, keep them on a leash to prevent unwanted encounters with wild animals.
- In winter, food is scarcer, and animals need to conserve their energy for heat. Do not approach wild animals to prevent any unnecessary energy expenditure on their part.
- In case of injury or accident, call 112 but don't leave the injured person alone.

Cross-Country Skiing

Cross-country skiing (or "Langlauf," as it is called in German) is a high-caliber cardio workout that burns calories and builds muscles. It is one of the best forms of outdoor winter exercise and will have you discovering the beauty of the winter landscape and the magic of the snow-covered fairytale forests. As you are exercising in the fresh air in small groups, always at a relatively safe distance from one another, it is the ideal sport in these times.

While Switzerland is best known for its downhill skiing, it also boasts over 5,000 km of cross-country or Nordic ski trails that are open to the public throughout the winter; they are marked by greenish-turquoise signposts. Many trails are groomed daily for both classic and skate skiing. Classic skiing, or diagonal technique, is the traditional technique most people think of when they imagine cross-country skiing. In recent years, skate skiing has become extremely popular as skiers have learned to enjoy the speed and athleticism of this more challenging technique. Throughout the Swiss cross-country trail system, the snow is clean, the views are spectacular, and there are no lift lines. And compared with alpine skiing, cross-country skiing is far more affordable. A daily trail pass typically costs under CHF 10, and a season pass for all Swiss Nordic ski trails is available for CHF 140. Cross-country skiers under age 16 ski for free. For more information about this pass or to purchase a pass, go to **www.langlauf.ch**.

What You Will Need: As cross-country skiing is a sport that will have you break a sweat, you will need breathable, winter-proof clothing that wicks humidity away from your body. It is recommended to dress in layers so that you can adjust if you get too warm. It is also important to wear a hat or headband and thin gloves. You will of course need skis, ski boots, and poles to propel you forward. All cross-country style skis have bindings that allow the heel to move freely, while the ball of the foot is fixed to the ski. The classic and skate skiing styles require slightly different skis and boots. You can rent the equipment in any ski area with cross-country trails or invest in your own if you plan on going out often. If you choose to buy them second hand, make sure that the boots you buy are well insulated and are compatible with the binding of the skis.

Difficulty Level: Cross-country ski trails are designated with three difficulty levels: "Easy" is for trails up to 8 km long and with an elevation gain of no more than 100 m, "Medium" is for trails from 8–16 km and/or with an elevation gain of up to 200 m; and "Difficult" is for trails that are longer than 16 km and/or have more than 300 m of elevation gain.

Where to Cross-Country Ski: Although Basel typically lacks the snow cover to support cross-country skiing throughout the winter, there are numerous excellent options in Switzerland. Apart from the Black Forest in Germany, the closest Swiss cross-country ski area with consistent snow coverage is at Loipe Langis near Sarnen, approximately 90 minutes from Basel by car. Equipment can be rented right there from Glanzmann Sport, and classes for classic and skate skiing are offered regularly according to a schedule posted on the Glanzmann Sport homepage. Loipe Langis is also accessible by train from Basel SBB to Sarnen and then the post bus to Langis.

In the Engadin valley, Pontresina is an excellent location for learning to ski, with several teaching centers working out of the Pontresina Langlauf Center. The Langlauf Center is adjacent to the train station, so you can get there by public transport as well as by car.

Goms (Ulrichen), Kandersteg, Davos, Lenzerheide, Gstaad, and St. Moritz also offer reliable snow conditions, opportunities for learning to ski, equipment rental, and convenient access to public transport. Additionally, for a long list of cross-country ski trails in Switzerland, visit the following sites:

- ***Langlauf.ch*** is the primary website for all information related to cross-country skiing in Switzerland. When you click on "Langlaufgebiete," it will take you to a map of Switzerland. Clicking on the color-coded regions will reveal all trails in that region, their elevation, type of skiing, whether they are equipped with lights for night skiing, and whether the trails are also suitable for winter hikes. **www.langlauf.ch**
- ***SwitzerlandMobility*** lists cross-country ski trails by region; simply type in your region of interest for a list of those in that area. You can also click on "Selected cross-country ski trails" to pick from trails in Swiss parks, night cross-country ski trails (where the lit trail is generally looped to start and end in the same place), as well as trails that are new to the 20/21 season. By clicking on the trail, you will receive information about length, ascent, number of stages, type of skiing (classic or skating), and difficulty level. You can download the app to take the info with you or print out the corresponding maps before departure. **www.schweizmobil.ch/en/cross-country-skiing.html**
- ***My Switzerland*** lists 155 cross-country ski trails around Switzerland with information on length, type of skiing, conditions, and altitude. **www.myswitzerland.com/en-ch/experiences/winter/cross-country-skiing**

Safety Tips for Cross-Country Skiers:

- Start at a speed that is slow enough to allow you to converse with a companion.
- Beginners should choose a flat, short trail that matches their ability.
- Factor in enough time to turn back as well as sufficient time for your tour.
- Read the information panel at the start of the trail carefully; find out about the different trails in the area and the rescue concept of the local trail organization.

Downhill Winter Sports
Ski & Snowboard

Downhill or alpine skiing is as ubiquitous to Switzerland as chocolate and cheese fondue. It would therefore hardly feel like winter in Switzerland if there was no skiing at all this year. Despite a storm of controversy at the beginning of the season, many of the mountain railways and ski areas have found a way, with strict compliance to protection measures in place, to remain open this winter.

Only two-thirds of the maximum capacity is permitted in all closed forms of transport, such as trains, gondolas, and cable cars, which applies to both seating and standing room. Masks are compulsory in the closed cable car cabins, on open-air lifts (chair lifts, drag lifts, and magic carpets), as well as in all queuing areas. Most spas and hotel restaurants are also expected to remain open, but only for hotel guests. Note that while there are strict federal measures in place for all winter sports facilities, each individual canton can apply their own, stricter measures as desired/needed. So be sure to check on the rules of your intended destination before heading out to assure good, safe fun without any surprises.

Where to Go: There are hundreds of options for downhill skiing in Switzerland, so choosing where to go can be overwhelming. For true ski buffs, regions like Zermatt, Saas Fee, and St. Moritz are a must, as much for their excellent pistes and breathtaking views as for their notoriety. However, if you are skiing with young children; if you are with a group of skiers and snowboarders with mixed proficiency levels; or if some members of your group would prefer to toboggan, snowshoe, hike, cross-country ski, or simply soak in a hot tub, you would best pick a resort to accommodate everyone's needs simultaneously. Former Basel resident and winter-sports enthusiast Nic Oatridge has put together a comprehensive website of Swiss ski resorts with meticulously summarized practical information to help you plan your winter sports fun. The site also includes detailed information on how to get there by car, including distances and directions from Basel, as well as by public transport, which is feasible even with a family burdened with buggies, ski gear, and the kids themselves. Check out his website, which is an invaluable tool for anyone planning a ski trip this winter. **www.swisswintersports.co.uk**

The following websites provide detailed information on Switzerland's many resorts and what they offer, as well as up-to-date information on pistes, snow conditions, and weather reports:
www.skiresort.info/ski-resorts/europe/switzerland
www.bergfex.com/schweiz
www.onthesnow.co.uk/switzerland/skireport.html
www.snowandrail.com
www.weatheronline.co.uk/snow/report

Family Famigros Ski Days—Personal Edition: If you are going skiing with your young family, consider joining a Family Famigros Ski Day. Every weekend throughout the winter months, Migros organizes a day in the snow for the whole family at a different location and at unbeatable prices. However, due to the current coronavirus pandemic, the Famigros Ski Day events of the 2020/21 season are organized in a different way, as a "Personal Edition." This means that while participating families will still receive a full-day ski pass for each family member, they now have the opportunity to customize the day according to their needs. The new cost for the Famigros Ski Days is CHF 90 (CHF 65 if you hold a Famigros card) for the whole family of 3–5 members (maximum 2 adults), with at least one child born 2007 or later. You register as usual via their website, where you can choose your favorite ski area or discover a new one among the 11 destinations. After registration, the ski tickets will be sent to you with a small surprise. The delivery will take place within five working days, and you can then use the tickets any time before the end of season, with no predetermined date! The number of tickets for each Famigros Ski Day location is limited, so don't hesitate to register your family early and enjoy your "Family Famigros Ski Day—Personal Edition" without any worries! If you are not yet a Famigros card holder, register for free at **www.famigros.ch/anmelden** to benefit from this discount, as well as countless other specials at Migros throughout the year. **www.famigros-ski-day.ch**

Tips for Saving Money: Skiing and snowboarding in Switzerland can be relatively expensive, with the larger resorts charging CHF 60–100 for a day pass for adults. Here are some ways to make it more affordable, particularly if you go as a family:

- Kids generally pay much less than adults (usually up to age 16), and students also get discounts. There are also senior discounts, but the age limit varies between age 60 and 65, depending on the ski resort. Make sure to bring ID cards for students, youths, and seniors, as they will not honor the discounts without proof!
- Many resorts offer family specials, but you must ask about these as they are not readily published.
- For ski areas located at high elevations (where you are almost guaranteed snow late in the season and in warmer winters), you often have to take a gondola to the base of the mountain. In this case, the Junior Karte, Halbtax, and GA travel cards from the SBB can usually be applied for discounts. Be sure to ask about these before buying your ticket, as this information is not written or volunteered! However, these cards cannot be applied to ski lifts per se!
- If you are staying at a nearby hotel, you should receive a guest card (Gästekarte); ask if this makes you eligible for a discount on your lift pass; these discounts are not always posted.
- Some of the larger ski areas have hundreds of runs, often on different parts of the mountains, and without a car you likely will not to be able to access them all. In this case, you may be able to buy cheaper lift passes that are limited to certain parts of the mountain.
- If you only plan to toboggan, let them know when you are buying your lift pass, as it is usually less expensive than if you plan to ski or snowboard.
- If you choose to go by train, look for the "Snow'n'Rail" deals offered by the SBB in the wintertime. These include train and ski passes together for a much-discounted price. **www.sbb.ch/en/leisure-holidays/leisure-offers/snownrail.html**
- If you go skiing without children, try to go outside of the school holidays of the region; the hills are much less crowded, the accommodations are cheaper, and the lift passes are also sometimes less expensive.

Adventurous Winter Accommodations

If you and your family are not really interested in a snow sport but mainly want to trade your urban environment for a snow-covered landscape, there are several exciting opportunities in Switzerland. You can of course stay in a hotel or rent/hire an apartment or chalet for a few days to enjoy some fresh air walks, build a snowman, or engage in a good old-fashioned snowball fight with the kids. HotellerieSuisse, GastroSuisse, and Switzerland's non-hotel accommodation interest group Parahotellerie Schweiz have developed specific measures to ensure the safety of guests when staying in accommodations in all service areas (**www.clean-and-safe.ch**).

With so many tourists cancelling their reservations at the last minute, there is an unusual amount of availability this year. Great accommodations can be found through **booking.com**, **Airbnb.com**, **interhome.com**, and the like. If, however, you are looking for an overnight stay of a more adventurous nature, you may want to consider spending the night in an igloo, a Whitepod, or at a farm.

Igloo Villages: If spending the night in an igloo sounds like an experience you just have to try once, then this may be for you. Every year, small igloo villages are built out of snow in several locations around Switzerland, including Davos, Zermatt, Gstaad, and Stockhorn. Each village contains several sleeping igloos that range from standard multi-bed igloos for families (up to six people) to romantic suites with private jacuzzies. You can also opt to build your own igloo ("love nest"), block by block, with the assistance of an igloo expert. The igloo villages are typically equipped with a bar, restaurant, and jacuzzi tub overlooking the mountains. The villages at Davos and Gstaad also feature a sauna. Each igloo is built and furnished with attention to detail; large and small ice sculptures carved by hand transform the rooms into glittering fantasy worlds. High-quality expedition sleeping bags that are good for up to -40°C will keep you cozy and warm at night. Enjoy snowshoeing or a night-time walk, tours through the igloo village, use of all facilities, a fondue dinner, tea served at your sleeping bag, and breakfast in the restaurant. All is included in your stay; prices start at CHF 259 per person. To find out more or to book your unforgettable experience, visit their multi-language website at **www.iglu-dorf.com/en**.

Whitepod Eco-Luxury Hotel: Nestled high in the Dents-du-Midi mountain range of the Swiss canton of Valais, Whitepod is an eco-luxury resort that offers guests a "glamping" (glamorous camping) experience in the beauty of the Swiss Alps, while staying true to its "zero impact" eco-conscious roots. A recipient of the Responsible Tourism Award for Innovation, the resort currently consists of pods that have a geodetic shape—a sphere composed only of triangles—as well as suite-chalets. The pods have a self-supporting framework that provides a solid structure while using a minimum of material. Each pod is positioned with a large bay window overlooking the valley below and the mountains beyond. There are seven kinds of pods ranging from "cozy" to family and deluxe pods, each heated only by a wood pellet stove and lit by lanterns, offering a cozy escape from the surrounding snowy landscape. A private ski hill and kilometers of marked hiking trails are also part of the Whitepod property. At 1400 m above sea level, there are no bright lights, no shops, and no neighbors at Whitepod. Entertainment comes in the form of hiking, skiing, snowshoeing, dogsledding, paragliding, or simply exploring the great outdoors; consuming the local cuisine; and relaxing in the stillness of the mountains. Whether as a romantic get-away or a family escape, Whitepod is truly a unique adventure both in winter and in summer! Prices start at CHF 340 per pod per night with a minimum stay of two nights, although three to four nights are recommended. Upon arrival, you will receive a backpack that contains a map and flashlight, and you will then be fitted with crampons and walking sticks for the 15-minute uphill hike to the pods—this is part of the Whitepod experience! The luggage is transported to your pod via snowmobile, where a staff member will provide you with instructions on pod use. Breakfast and tea-time snacks are offered free of charge in the Whitepod chalet, and exclusively, Whitepod guests can enjoy fine local cuisine in the restaurant of the Reception Chalet. Whitepod is approximately 220 km from Basel, just south of Montreux. If you go by car, free parking is available at the Reception Chalet; be sure to have snow tires and/or chains on your car. Whitepod can also be reached by train or bus. **www.whitepod.com**

Winter Holidays on the Farm: Agrotourism, the agriculturally based activities that attract tourists to a farm or ranch for holidays, has become very popular in this part of Europe. People or families looking to get away from the crowds and back to the basics for holidays have plenty of opportunities in Switzerland, with over 320 Swiss farms promoting agrotourism for everyone to enjoy. In the warmer months, families can enjoy farm life, spending the night in a barn or holiday house; adventure seekers can cycle from farm to farm; and children can experience life on the farm without their parents. But holidays on the farm are not limited to the warmer months; it is becoming a tradition for some families to spend their winter holidays on farms as well. Families who prefer to pass up the crowded ski resorts for a quieter and more relaxing winter adventure with their kids are choosing winter holidays on the farm. If the calm serenity of nature in winter, fresh air, and beautiful surrounding landscape seems even more appropriate this winter, why not settle down for a few days on a farm, in a cozy apartment or room? You still will have plenty of opportunities for exercising outdoors while being treated to some locally grown, healthy fine dining. You can pick a farm in the neighboring cantons of Baselland and Aargau, or one of the many farms located near winter sports areas, where a day trip for skiing or snowboarding is also possible. To book your next winter escape to a farm, visit the Agrotourismus Schweiz website, **www.myfarm.ch/en** (available in German, French, and English), plug in your desired dates, and select a region for a list of participating farms with available rooms or holiday houses.

Getting to Your Winter Fun

If you decide to take advantage of Switzerland's giant outdoor playground this winter and head out for some fresh mountain air and/or winter sports, planning safe travel to your destination is an important part of the preparation. Switzerland has a fantastic public transport system set up to bring winter sports enthusiasts safely and quickly to their destination. Its highways and mountain passes are also very good and well maintained, allowing families bogged down with lots of luggage, skis, and strollers to arrive safely at their destination. How ever you choose to travel, the following is some practical information that may help with your preparations.

Public Transport

Travelling by train for ski or other winter sports has been a favored mode of transport for years. The SBB offers great deals for a combination of travel and lift tickets that can be found at **www.sbb.ch/en/leisure-holidays/leisure-offers/snownrail.html**. For added ease of travel, you can send your skis and other luggage in advance from station to station for a fee. Skis and ski boots are to be packed separately in pairs in the appropriate plastic cover provided by the SBB; you can also pack multiple pairs in your personal bags up to a maximum weight of 25 kg. For snowboards, you can pack one snowboard per plastic cover provided by the SBB or multiple boards in personal bags up to maximum 25 kg. For details on procedure and price, go to **www.sbb.ch/en/station-services/before-your-journey/luggage/luggage/station-to-station.html**.

Despite the pandemic, train travel in Switzerland is still considered a safe and environmentally friendly way to get around. The SBB has increased the frequency of cleaning their trains in response to the crisis, cleaning and disinfecting objects that customers touch as well as surfaces such as grab poles, buttons, tables, armrests, and toilets several times a day. In total, around 1,000 SBB employees are deployed to clean the trains. In addition, the air in the passenger areas is fully replaced with outside air at an average rate of 6–10 times per hour.

Furthermore, it is mandatory that face masks must be worn in all public transport vehicles and associated buildings in Switzerland. This requirement also applies to stations, platform areas, waiting rooms, underpasses, and shops. The only exceptions are for people who cannot wear a mask for medical reasons and for children under age 12. The SBB also recommends that passengers keep their distance from others, leave seat spaces between them and non-family members, avoid peak travel times whenever possible, buy their tickets online, and observe good hygiene practices regarding washing/disinfecting hands, etc.

Eating and drinking is still permitted on trains, and you are permitted to remove your mask to do so, but be sure to disinfect your hands before and after, and use common sense! It is a good idea to plan your meals/snacks in advance, because the Federal Council has mandated changes to opening hours for rail catering and for shops as well as food and drink outlets in stations. Essentially, only take-away outlets will remain open for the time being. Furthermore, SBB restaurants, bars, and bistros on trains will be out of service until further notice.

Travelling by Car

If you have decided to make your journey by car, it is important to plan your route in advance, especially in winter, when inclement weather and road conditions can considerably affect your route. Be sure to go online and check the conditions of the roads, and especially the mountain passes, before you head out. You should also make sure that your car is up to the trip—check that your heater is in good working order, you have plenty of anti-freeze and windshield wiper fluid, your windshield wipers are in good shape, your battery is still in good health, and that you have winter-friendly motor oil. If your car is due for a check-up, this would be a great time!

It is also recommended when you make a road trip in winter to carry certain emergency supplies with you. These include warm clothes, good winter gloves, ice scraper, snow shovel, jumper cables, road flares, cold-weather blanket, flashlight, first-aid kit, car charger and portable USB power charger, and water/snacks.

Note that it is illegal for you to drive your car in Switzerland unless you have removed ALL snow from your windshield. If the snow is only partially cleared, you can get fined. Furthermore, you are not allowed to let your car idle for the purpose of melting the snow off your windshield.

In Switzerland, there are no legal requirements for the use of snow tires. However, if you drive to the mountains during snow season, it is highly recommended that you have them on your car. You should, however, carry snow chains in your car when travelling in Switzerland in the wintertime. Road signs signaling "Schneeketten obligatorisch" (chains obligatory) will indicate when it is compulsory to have snow chains on your tires. Failure to have them when required can result in a fine, even in a 4-wheel drive. Snow chains should be installed on both driving wheels in a normal car, and on all four wheels in a 4-wheel drive to retain as much of the normal handling characteristics as possible. Not all chains fit on all tires, so be sure to get the right ones and practice putting them on in advance—trying to fit them for the first time while pulled over on the side of the highway in a snowstorm is not a pleasant experience! You can be fined if you obstruct traffic because you failed to prepare your vehicle for the local weather conditions. In addition, if you don't have chains, the police can stop you from continuing your journey and you will be forced to turn back. Moreover, if you are involved in an accident in icy conditions without snow chains, your insurance may not cover you!

You must also have a "Pannendreieck" (warning triangle) in your car at all times in case of emergencies. If you break down or have an accident, you need to place the warning triangle at a reasonable distance behind your car to warn approaching traffic of the potential dangers. Failure to have one can result in a fine.

Finally, note that many passes in the Alps are closed during winter (even in summer, it can snow at higher elevations, leading to road closings over passes for a few hours to a few days). So before heading out, make sure that you are well prepared and be sure to check the weather and road conditions!