



All the most memorable moments from the Royal



A first look at the Royal wedding cake and all the gossip from inside



Nottingham cottage: where the Duke & Duchess of Sussex will



The 50 best restaurants in London right now



The top see at the Flower:



HOTELS

Laid-back elegance at Le Grand Bellevue, Gstaad

With a Michelin-starred restaurant and first-class spa, Le Grand Bellevue is primed for après-ski (or après-shopping in glitzy Gstaad)



BY CAROLINE BULLOUGH
THURSDAY 17 MAY 2018



The train journey from Geneva airport to Gstaad is a Caran d'Ache pencil-box, picture-perfect Alpine experience. Views of glassy Lake Geneva encircled by mountains give way to the steep slopes and chalet villages of the Bernese Oberland. There's a feeling of the worries of the outside world falling away as the train track climbs towards Gstaad – very appropriate for a town with the motto 'Come up – slow down'.

Le Grand Bellevue is mere minutes from the station; it's also a short stroll from the cobbled centre's discreetly ritzy Louis Vuitton and Prada stores, and the distinctive turrets of the Gstaad Palace hotel high on its hill. Built in 1912, Le Grand Bellevue's exterior exudes Belle Epoque grandeur, but inside there is an unexpectedly relaxed vibe, enhanced by House of Hackney statement wallpapers, boudoir fringed pendants, pineapple wall lights and a large tweed-covered camel in the public rooms. In the individually decorated bedrooms, the colour schemes are more subdued. A symphony in shades of chocolate and taupe, our Tower Suite had an outside circular sofa, deliciously large, downy bed and wall-to-wall wardrobing.



In a town as protective of its heritage as Gstaad, the arrival of new owners with big plans in 2012 must have raised a few eyebrows. Their top-to-toe refurbishment (including, most recently, the revamp of the subterranean spa) has been described as 'Swiss Family Soho House'. The description does have veracity that goes beyond the fun feel of the eclectic interiors, because ever-present owner Daniel Koester and his wife Davia have ensured that the hotel has a very personal, familial feel. As one of the many effusive reviews on Tripadvisor says, 'It feels like it must have been felt in the old times when the managers were not CEOs but hosts to the guests.'

That's the thing about Gstaad, despite its reputation as a playground for the rich and famous, it's reassuringly old school and unexpectedly low key. Of course, Le Grand Bellevue offers a five-star, Swiss version of low key. Service throughout the hotel is attentive without being fussy and the staff are universally friendly - from the drivers who ferry us to the Eggli slopes for a day's skiing, to the deft waiters in Leonard's brasserie. The restaurant wears its Michelin star lightly, so the menu includes Le Grand Burger alongside immaculately presented daily specials, such as saffron risotto with veal sweetbreads, and apple and mango salad in a honey basket with yogurt spumante. Should you feel the need for a cheese fondue or raclette fix in quintessentially Alpine surroundings, there's Le Petit Chalet in the hotel grounds, overseen by the charming Laurent.

When you have had enough of skiing or shopping or walking or sipping hot chocolate (apparently, some 40 per cent of visitors to Gstaad don't ski), the hotel's Grand Spa offers multiple, the-world-is-your-oyster delights - a Turkish hammam, a Finnish sauna, a Himalayan salt room, even a Roman laconium - alongside home-grown treatment options such as the Swiss Alp Salt Bath.

Prices for the 2018-2019 winter season start at CHF 585 [about £425], half board including a three-course dinner at Leonard's. Prices for summer 2018 start at CHF 351 [about £255], B&B. Visit bellevue-gstaad.ch. Swiss Transfer Tickets for the train cost from £116 from swisstravelsystem.co.uk. For more information about Gstaad, visit gstaad.ch.