

The Telegraph, UK

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Riffelalp Resort 2222m

Zermatt, Valais, Switzerland

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A five-star hotel as stirring as its altitude. Piste-side Riffelalp seems in touching distance of the Matterhorn and oozes superlatives – including Europe’s highest pool and tramway. Three restaurants complete the resort, which featured in BBC series 'The Night Manager'.

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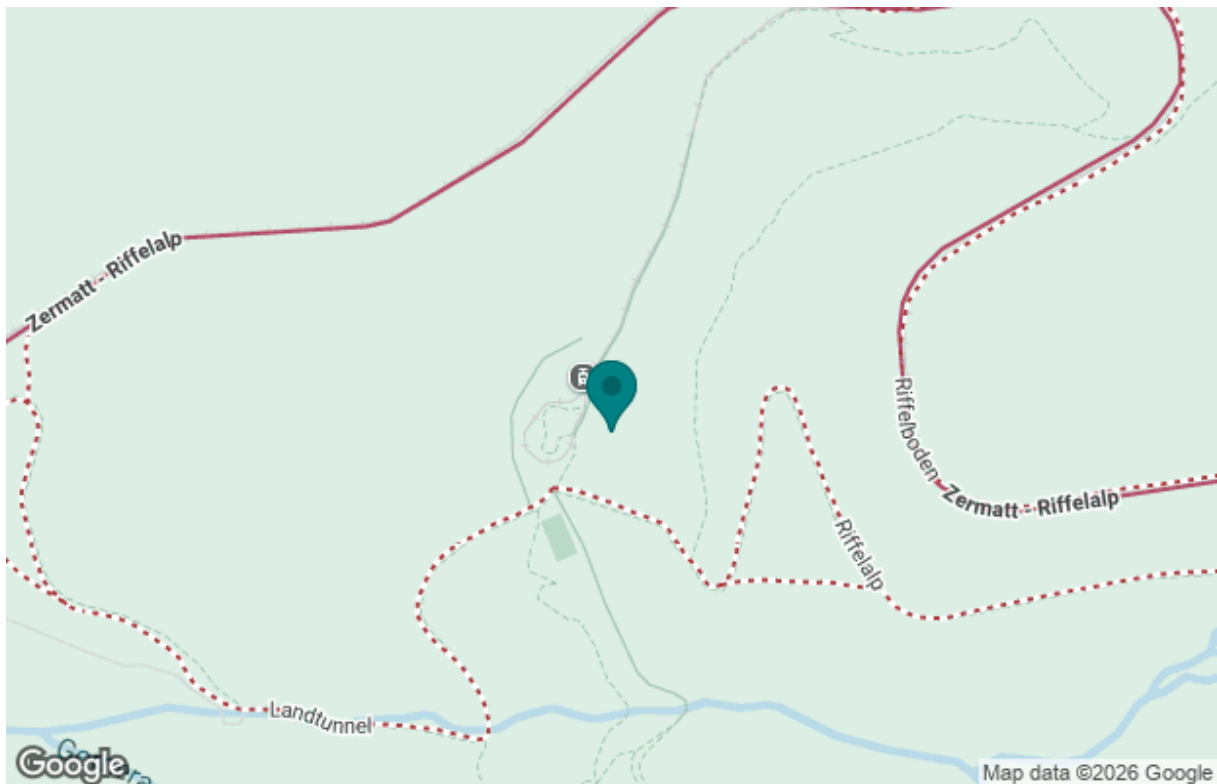
[Emily Rose Mawson](#) Travel writer

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Location

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Riffelalp occupies quite a spot at 2,222 metres' altitude, and enjoys larger-than-life close-ups of the Matterhorn. The arrival is thrilling – first by the trundling Gornergrat mountain railway, then by snowmobile in winter or Europe's highest tram in summer. It's 20 minutes down to Zermatt, with trains running until 11.30pm, or the same up to the Gornergrat, where views extend over 29 summits. You can ski from the doorstep in winter, and in summer there are nice hiking trails, including the spectacular Five Lakes Walk.



Style and Character

8 / 10

Don't be deceived by Riffelalp's modest collection of stone and wood façades. Inside, idiosyncratic chalet charm invites love at first sight. In the lobby, a delightful flock of life-sized gold, silver and furry sheep clamour for space among antiques, and wooden bears prop up table tops. Almost two thousand porcelain swallows look as if they are flying up the wall in typical formation above huge monochrome portraits of wild animals. The effect is more tongue-in-cheek than showy, however, and rustic-look corridors, patterned rugs and the aroma of wood make for a relaxed setting.



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Service and Facilities

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Smiley porter Dragan is often the first person guests encounter when they arrive in Zermatt, where he awaits to help them onto the Gornergrat train. The welcome at the hotel is also very friendly. Concierge Chandra is extremely helpful and general manager Hans-Jörg Walther, otherwise known as “keeper of the hut”, is a louder-than-life personality always ready to have a laugh with guests.

Facilities are comprehensive, including a billiards room, two bowling alleys, and a games room with table football and consoles. An excellent addition is in-house mountain guide Yann, who runs excursions such as snow shoeing and heliskiing free of charge (excluding transport, lift passes and equipment rental). In summer, he treats guests to rock-climbing and

summitting 4,000-metre peaks, as well as traversing the Gorner Gorge. There is also a ski rental shop and a shiny ski room with private lockers.

Spa

9 / 10

The St. Trop Alp spa is the resort's trump card, beautifully picturesque with a wood-beamed ceiling and panoramic windows. It is Europe's highest spa and outdoor pool – featured in BBC series 'The Night Manager' – that faces the Matterhorn. It also has an indoor pool, a relaxation area with an open fireplace and an extensive thermal zone with multiple saunas and marble steam rooms of varying temperatures. There is also a grotto with waterfalls and herbal infusions, and a mini gym.

The slightly dated-looking treatment rooms belie the quality of the massages on offer. You can choose from a full range that includes lymphatic drainage and Ayurvedic treatments, but a lovely suits-all option is the Alpine-Herbal Stamp Massage. After a foot bath, you are treated to a foot, face and neck massage, before warm oils and 'stamps' – local herbs bound in linen bags – are massaged across the body to open the pores, relax the muscles and soften the skin. It's sleep-inducingly soothing and leaves skin velvet-soft.

Rooms

9 / 10

The 65 warm, low-ceilinged rooms are encased in hefty oak panelling and decorated with natural-toned linen furnishings, houndstooth-upholstered wingbacks and soft lighting in the shape of stylish floor lamps. There's remote-control lighting and digital directories with useful information, Spotify and YouTube. Most rooms have a balcony – some so close to the piste they feel like commentary boxes – and the majority have a Matterhorn view.

Room 309 is a fantastic space, complete with gallery and spiral staircase, but there is the same high standard throughout: large beds with leather headboards; striking stone-and-wood bathrooms furnished with fresh flowers; large bathtubs and separate showers. Opt for the 'Chalet' rather than the 'Nostalgie' building for the largest rooms.

Food and Drink

9 / 10

For gourmet fare head to Alexandre, where lashings of oak and granite, a botanically decorated ceiling, soft-focus lighting and super-comfortable chairs lend Alpine cosiness. Italian head chef Luigi Lafranco whips up seasonal five-course 'surprise menus' and international à la carte options. The sea bass with spinach and rösti is light but succulent and satisfying. Breakfast is also served here, a nice buffet of cereals, fruit, baked goods and freshly pressed juices, while cooked options such as creamy scrambled egg with smoked salmon and chives are prepared on request.

Panoramic Restaurant Al Bosco is more informal with staff who set a jolly tone. It's all oak cladding and Matterhorn views, and serves hearty Swiss-Italian fare such as Alpine-inspired pizzas or juicy roast chicken with peppery 'diavolo' stuffing, roast potatoes and just-right veggies. The Lughanighetta sausage, sourced in Canton Ticino, is also delicious.

For light bites, there is the Lounge-Bar, an English country manor-inspired space with leather armchairs around a crackling fireplace, a live pianist and a lovely sun terrace. For fondue and raclette, Walliserkeller opens in the winter, and there is a sleek Vinothek that hosts wine tastings.

Value for Money

8 / 10

Double rooms from 700 Swiss Francs (£559) in low winter season; and from 920 Swiss Francs (£734) in high winter season. In summer, rates are slashed, with prices from 585 Swiss Francs (£467) in low season; and from 640 Swiss Francs (£510) in high. Breakfast, Wi-Fi and transfers on arrival and departure included. If the price seems high, it is worth it for the altitude and Matterhorn views.

Access for guests with disabilities?

There is an adapted loo but the resort is not suitable for guests with disabilities.

Family-Friendly?

Very. There are several interconnecting rooms, and a nursery is available daily until 10.30pm (except Saturdays). Babysitting can be arranged on request for toddlers. There is also a children's supper table and a ski school for children over the age of three at nearby Riffelberg.