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Press kit

Flavours and terroir in Valais



[www.visitvalais.ch/winetourism](http://www.visitvalais.ch/winetourism)

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PROMOTION**

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## Valais, a land of superlatives

Tucked away in the heart of the Alps, in a corner of southern Switzerland between France and Italy, Valais shares with its neighbours a way of life infused with *la dolce vita* and a Mediterranean climate in which vineyards thrive in a rocky landscape. This is a land that surprises visitors throughout the seasons with wonderfully characteristic wines and culinary creations which draw on the bounty of good food produced in this exceptional terroir.

### Switzerland's foremost wine region

When travelling through the Rhône Valley, your attention is immediately caught by the dry stone walls that criss-cross the hillsides. Creating sun-baked terraces where vines can flourish, they are the work of the local people, who first discovered how to tame the slopes in the early modern era. 3,000 kilometres of walls were built by hand in this way, without using a single gram of cement! Some 5,000 hectares of vines prosper amidst the geological riches of Valais, in this landscape full of contrasts and character. These include around 50 grape varieties with the AOC designation of origin, each of which benefits from Valais's exceptionally sunny climate and the complexity of its mix of granite, calcareous and morainic soil. And Valais's winemakers produce their exceptional wines year after year with great respect for these gifts of nature. On the *route des grands vins*, the fine wine route stretching from Burgundy to Piedmont, Valais – the most environmentally friendly wine-growing region in Europe and most extensive in Switzerland – is an excellent place to savour an elegant Petite Arvine or an intense Cornalin.

### From apricots to authentic raclette cheese

But in Valais, the 300 days of sunshine a year do more than just ripen the magnificent grapes in the vineyards stretching from Chablais to Visperterminen. They also help concentrate the sugar in the fruit and vegetables grown in the wide Rhone valley. Known as the “prince of the orchards” thanks to their velvety skin and succulent flesh, Valais apricots make up more than 96% of the Swiss market. Asparagus, strawberries, raspberries, apples and the famous Williams pear are also cultivated on either side of the river.

In summer, more than 500 mountain pastures extend above the forests of larch and arolla pines, producing a varied abundance of flora whose aromas can be detected in the milk and cheese. Raclette du Valais AOP, a cheese with protected designation of origin, is another typical product that stands out in the Swiss culinary landscape. Valais has the largest number of products in the country – eight in total – that bear the AOP (protected designation of origin) and IGP (protected geographical indication) designations. These include its Valais dried meat IGP, Valais rye bread AOP, Abricotine AOP apricot brandy, etc.

### Flavours of Valais and fine dining

The exceptional local produce on offer delights both cooks and artisan food producers alike, who never miss an opportunity to promote regional dishes. At present, 60 establishments have been awarded the “*Saveurs du Valais*” (Flavours of Valais) label for showcasing the work of the farmers and winegrowers in their delicious cuisine made using typical products. Also, the stars that decorate the Valais flag have been multiplying between the shores of Lake Geneva and Upper

Valais to distinguish fine-dining restaurants. From Vouvry to Ernen, 72 establishments share 996 Gault&Millau points between them (2017 figures), making Valais one of the Swiss cantons with the highest number of gourmet restaurants per inhabitant.

In Valais, authenticity and centuries-old traditions flirt with boldness and innovation, coming up with delicacies such as rye crisps, tartar of dried meat, or raclette flambéed in Abricotine AOP. Unique experiences can be enjoyed close to nature and among artisans eager to share their talents.

#### Some facts and figures on the inimitable taste of Valais:

- Switzerland's largest wine-growing region with 5,000 hectares of vines
- 50 grape varieties cultivated between 400 and 1,100 metres in altitude
- 3,000 kilometres of dry stone walls
- Swiss champion in products with protected designation of origin/geographical indication: 25% are labelled AOP-IGP
- 72 gourmet establishments and 60 "Flavours of Valais" restaurants

## Valais – an open-air treasure house of wine

Tucked away in the heart of the Alps between France and Italy, Valais enjoys an exceptional climate and natural environment. With almost 300 days of sunshine a year, this Swiss canton is privileged with an almost Mediterranean ambience. It also lies at the centre of Europe, on the *route des grands vins*, the fine wine route stretching from Burgundy to Piedmont. From pruning through to harvesting, the sun's rays help ripen the magnificent grapes in Valais's vineyards, while the contrast between warm days and cool nights give the different grape varieties their complexity and delicate aromas.

Concentrated in the area between the bend of the Rhône and the vines perched up high on the slopes at Visperterminen, Valais's vineyards cover more than 5,000 hectares. In other words, this is the most extensive wine-growing region in Switzerland, set between the vineyards of Lavaux and the Jungfrau - Aletsch Glacier, two exceptional sites included on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Welcome to Switzerland's largest open-air house of wine!

### **Indigenous and traditional grape varieties cultivated between 400 and 1,100 metres in altitude**

To understand the greatness and reputation of Valais wines, we must cast a look back at the emergence of the Alps and the formation of its mountain ranges. Folds, landslides and the superposition of layers have formed a soil that is as rich as it is complex. This multiplicity is now reflected in the mosaic of grape varieties that grow here. These include more than 50 with the AOC designation of origin, each of which benefits from Valais's mix of granite, morainic, calcareous and gravelly earth.

Valais's winemakers have built almost 3,000 kilometres of dry stone walls on this steep terrain, thus creating sun-baked terraces where vines can flourish. Grape varieties considered indigenous, such as Arvine, Cornalin and Humagne Rouge, are cultivated here alongside genuine rarities such as Lafnetscha and Himbertscha, all of which were probably born in Valais. Varieties considered traditional, such as the fresh and fruity Fendant, which produces the most popular of aperitif wines, or Johannisberg, Pinot Noir and Syrah were introduced here prior to 1900. At Visperterminen, the highest continuous vineyard in Europe climbs to 1,100 metres in altitude. This is where the Savagnin blanc grape (also known as *Heida* in German and *Paiën* in French) thrives, offering notes that range from citrus to exotic fruits. Lastly, certain wines reference Valais's role as the "water reservoir" of the Alps. The "Les Titans" range from Provins pays tribute to the dam-builders. Petite Arvine, Pinot Noir, Merlot and red and white blends are filled into barrels before being hauled up to an altitude of 1,500 metres where they are stored deep inside the mountain. This special creation has already been awarded several international medals.

### **Experiencing Valais's vineyards**

Between these towering dry-stone walls, true gems of ecological craftsmanship, run a number of intersecting paths that can be hiked at any time of year. The *Chemin du Vignoble* is a vineyard trail starting from Martigny and stretching for 66 kilometres all the way to Leuk. Passing by the largest wine-making municipalities in Valais, such as Chamoson and Salgesch, the trail is punctuated by idyllic little huts

where hikers can stop off and enjoy a glass of Malvoisie, with its nutty aroma, or a powerful Cornalin, with notes of black cherry.

The hillsides around Sion, the capital of Valais, offer a number of itinerant wine tasting options, especially the paths leading to *Clos du Château* or *Clos d'Uvrier*, where all the class and flair of the canton's Grand Crus can be savoured. Proud to convey their art, winemakers also provide B&B-style accommodation at several destinations in Valais. In Fully, Chamoson, Vetroz and Sierre, for example, guest rooms reflect the good taste of these artisans and let visitors share in a moment of authenticity.

### **Wine culture is part of the local DNA**

Wine culture is firmly embedded in the genes of the local people. From a glass of Fendant offered at formal ceremonies to lively, improvised evenings in the family-run "carnotzets" by way of an aperitif that brings together friends and work colleagues at the end of the day, it takes various forms and is synonymous with friendliness and sharing.

That is why the people of Valais dedicate major events to wine and winemaking. In the spring, more than 200 wineries invite visitors to come along to tastings during the Open Cellar Days. In September, Sierre - known as the "City of Sun" - hosts the *Salon Vinea*, the biggest open-air wine fair in Switzerland. This is an unmissable fixture in the calendar of any food and wine lover, easily reachable by public transport from all parts of the country.

As for the thousands of years of history of this wine-producing region, it is retraced in the Wine Museum at Sierre and Salgesch, whose two sites show permanent and temporary exhibitions revealing the secrets of this tradition, which is often considered a living art. A 6km trail runs between the two cultural venues, crossing more than 30 vineyards and passing by picturesque winegrowers' homes.

### **Rilke enchanted by Valais's viticulture**

To enjoy a glass of wine is to enjoy a moment out of time, there's nothing like a short spell of relaxation and conviviality among friends or in the company of winemakers. Enchanting moments suspended in time, which the poet Rainer Maria Rilke described in July 1921 as he was passing through Veyras, near Sierre: "*[...] what holds me on the other hand is this wonderful Valais: I was imprudent enough to travel down here, to Sierre and Sion; I have told you what a singular charm these regions exercised over me when I first saw them last year at the time of the vintage [...]*".

## Valais – A fascinating terroir

Robust wines with mineral notes, cheeses with floral undertones, vitamin-rich fruit and vegetables, characterful salted meats and rare spices – Valais is home to a large number of local specialities that taste simply wonderful. From the flatlands of the Rhone valley to the mountain pastures, not forgetting the sun-kissed orchards, the canton is a garden of delights where know-how that has been passed down through the generations combines with daring culinary creations to create sheer joy for the taste buds.

### **Valais, Swiss AOP-IGP champion**

With eight products bearing a protected designation of origin (AOP) or protected geographical indication (IGP) label, Valais ranks top in Switzerland for quality certification. Thanks to the entrepreneurial spirit and love of the land shared by local producers, the canton accounts for almost 25% of all Swiss products with the AOP and IGP labels. These quality marks guarantee that products genuinely originate from the region after which they are named and are made using traditional recipes and techniques. In the case of the AOP protected designation of origin, every stage in the production process – from the raw material to the processing and preparation of the finished product – takes place in Valais. In the case of the IGP protected geographical indication, at least one stage of the process must take place here.

**Raclette du Valais AOP** is a semi-hard mountain cheese made from raw cow's milk. Depending on the season, it is made either in the dairy or on the mountain pastures, where the alpine herbs lend the milk subtle floral notes. Synonymous with conviviality, raclette has become an iconic Valais dish that is enjoyed by melting a piece of cheese over a wood fire or directly under a hot grill. According to legend, a vintner by the name of Leon invented the dish one cold and wet day in the vineyards of Valais. Desperate for a hot meal, he melted some cheese over the fire he had lit to keep him warm. And so raclette was born! Today, potatoes, gherkins, pickled onions and a glass of Fendant – one of the region's typical white wines – form the perfect accompaniment to the smooth, creamy textures of this dish.

**Viande séchée du Valais IGP**, or Valais dried meat, is a product born of the ingenuity of the mountain dwellers. In days gone by, the climatic conditions in the Alps made it necessary to preserve food for the winter by salting beef and hanging it up to dry in the granaries and barns. This technique, which dates back to the 14th century, has been handed down through the generations and is now the pride of every producer in Valais, whose expertise is expressed in the mix of spices they use to give each piece of dried meat its own unique flavour.

**Jambon cru IGP and Lard sec du Valais IGP**, or raw ham and bacon, are the latest additions to the AOP-IGP family and make up part of a typical “assiette valaisanne” alongside dried meat, rye bread and cheese. Their special flavour is determined by the unique seasoning applied to the pork by each artisan butcher and the length of the drying period.

**Pain de seigle valaisan AOP**, or rye bread, is noted for the cracked appearance of its crust and for its basic round shape. Infused with the authentic flavour of Valais, this slightly acidic bread was the staple daily food in the villages of Valais for a long time, rye being the only type of grain that is able to adapt to the conditions found in the mountains. It can be enjoyed for breakfast or lunch, or as an aperitif snack, spread with honey or garlic butter and as an accompaniment to dried meat or sérac cheese.

**Safran de Mund AOP**, saffron from the village of Mund, comes from the dried stigmas of the crocus flower, which are then made into a powder. Each year, three kilos of immeasurable value are gathered on the plateau of Mund, a small village in Upper Valais. Although the quantity produced is small, its reputation goes far beyond the boundaries of Valais, Mund being one of the few places in Switzerland to cultivate this “red gold”. A valuable spice that is as rare as it is prized, saffron is used to season a number of dishes such as *Riz jaune* (a rice dish that is a speciality of Upper Valais), regional pasta and soups, as well as adding a delicate flavouring to bread and eaux-de-vie. A real nugget in Valais’s terroir of gold!

**Valais wines AOC** feature the more than 50 grape varieties that are cultivated throughout the canton’s idyllic vineyards. Awarded the Stars of Valais, the highest distinction in the leading competition for AOC Valais wines, the “*Sélection Vins du Valais*” are wines of elegance and complex aromas which have won numerous accolades at international competitions. Today, young and enthusiastic winemakers from Valais are making their mark in viticulture alongside established talents and renowned winemaking families. Cultivated with respect for the environment, the wines of Valais can be enjoyed as an aperitif and during meals, as well as savoured with salty foods and artisanal chocolate.

**Abricotine AOP** is a brandy made from Luizet apricots, which were first introduced to the orchards of Valais in 1838. This sweet variety retains all the flavour of its juicy, succulent flesh after cooking, infusing the brandy with an intense aroma. As clear as spring water, Abricotine AOP has an alcohol content of almost 40%, with its distinctively fruity taste hiding just a hint of almond. It can be enjoyed after a good meal, poured over a sorbet or in a cocktail.

**L'Eau-de-vie de poire du Valais AOP**, or Valais pear brandy, is made entirely from Williams pears. Their flavour, superior quality and aroma combine to produce a strong and fruity yet delicate spirit. As with Abricotine AOP, the quality mark guarantees that the fruits are sourced locally and the distillation process takes place in the region. And, as with the apricot brandy, it can be enjoyed as a *digestif*, especially after a raclette or cheese fondue.

### **The Valais brand - dynamic and eco-friendly**

In addition to the AOP and IGP labels certifying strong links to the terroir and its heritage, Valais is simply bursting with local products that can be bought directly from the manufacturers and other points of sale in the area. The Valais brand has been conferred on over forty products typical of the region, honouring the best that the canton has to offer. In addition to serving as a mark of recognition of their

origin and quality, this label also guarantees that the products were made with respect for the environment and social ethics.

The Valais brand thus distinguishes agricultural produce such as white and green asparagus, Valais apricots, soft fruit including strawberries, raspberries and cherries, as well as *cidre brut* (a strong, dry cider) and a number of nectars made from fruit grown in Valais's orchards. As an indication of environmentally friendly production methods, the Valais brand has inspired other European regions to develop their own labels along the same lines – such as Brittany with its '*produit en Bretagne*' (Made in Brittany) designation.

### **Valais water, born in the heart of the Alps**

The Valais brand also extends to high-quality drinks such as mineral water sourced from the Aproz springs at the foot of the Mont-Fort glacier. Flowing through many layers of rock, the water becomes enriched with calcium, magnesium, potassium and other minerals that are beneficial to the human organism. Valais water is thus unmatched in its purity, undergoing no treatment prior to bottling.

The values embodied by the Valais brand and in its selection of flavours and terroirs inspire daring and innovative culinary creations. Take, for example, rye crisps flavoured with apple juice, tomato salad with crumbly sérac cheese, raclette flambéed in Abricotine AOP, chocolate-coated “pearls” of rye or grape seed bread. With its deep roots in Valais's history, dried meat is given a new twist as an ingredient for tartar and carpaccio.

Valais is a year-round destination for food lovers: imbued with the magic of scents and flavours that make this part of the country a fascinating terroir!



## Valais – Astonishing gourmet treats

“*Man’s best medicine is his food,*” according to Joseph Favre, who founded the Académie Culinaire de France in 1888. This visionary genius was born and raised in Valais – in Vex, to be precise, a small village at the mouth of the Val d’Hérens. He was convinced of the power and beneficial effects of good cooking, and the land of his birth has done him proud. A destination for food lovers, there are numerous places in Valais where hospitality goes hand in hand with culinary experiences.

### **The top chefs love Valais**

A warm and warm-hearted area in the south of Switzerland, tucked away at the feet of the most majestic Alpine summits, Valais is home to many gastronomic treasures and customs. If forced to mention just one, it would be raclette, a dish instinctively served at almost every village and family celebration. What is more, Valais is one of the Swiss regions with the highest number of gourmet restaurants per inhabitant. Gault&Millau list 72 establishments between Vouvry and Ernen, with a total of 996 points between them (2017 figures).

With 19 points and two Michelin stars, Didier de Courten in Sierre embodies excellence and creativity in his cuisine. The chef loves working with Valais products and is happy to share his passion for Hérens beef, conjuring up astoundingly inventive dishes from local and non-local ingredients. Further up, at the foot of the Matterhorn, Zermatt has a galaxy of award-winning restaurants to match its famous mountain. The resort has notched up more than 250 Gault&Millau points and attracted some of the biggest names on the Swiss culinary scene, including Ivo Adam, another Michelin two-star chef.

### **“Assiette valaisanne” at any time**

Like neighbouring Italy with its *dolce vita*, Valais is famous for the friendliness and passion of its population as symbolised by the indispensable “assiette valaisanne”, a dish made up of traditional cheeses and meats with AOP-IGP designation. From producers to restaurant owners to winemakers – all are committed to offering guests simple yet unforgettable moments thanks to the original flavours of their high-quality products. This idea of sharing is common to all the restaurants displaying the *Saveurs du Valais* label. More than 60 restaurants throughout the canton use it to showcase the riches of the local terroir. These chefs apply their expertise to seasonal ingredients such as asparagus, Hérens beef, saffron and mountain cheese, giving special priority to AOP- and IGP-certified products that guarantee the true flavours of regional specialities.

The “Flavour of Valais” label means diners can enjoy a real “assiette valaisanne” at any time of day as well as several hot dishes and desserts made using local products. In addition, with more than 50 different grape varieties cultivated across the canton, Valais is a wine-producing region par excellence. The beauty of Valais wine lies in its variety and infinite nuances.

### **Gourmet experiences at high altitude**

Both in the sparkling snow and the gentle heat of summer, several food-themed festivals are held high up in the mountains, offering visitors breathtaking

experiences. Inspired by the wine- and food-themed hiking trails that abound on Valais's hillsides, the Ski Food Safari in Crans-Montana takes the concept up another level. This novel and truly unique event invites participants to ski between different restaurants in the ski area - all run by top chefs and offering stunning panoramic views.

In the month of June, the Saas-Fee Gourmet Trail allows participants to enjoy delicious creations from the resort's best chefs and sommeliers as they ramble through the stunning scenery at the foot of the glacier. A culinary discovery journey surrounded by 13 mountain peaks and culminating at over 4,000 metres above sea level.

A short distance away, devotees of gourmet cuisine gather in Zermatt every August for the Swiss Food Festival, where they can admire a beautiful view of the Matterhorn. Its motto of "Swissness and fine dining" speaks volumes about the excellence of the appetizers and menus presented by the chefs of the 19 Gault&Millau restaurants in the world's most popular resort.

From the shores of Lake Geneva to the borders of the Goms valley, the seasons and customs of the local cuisine are duly celebrated, providing as much contrast and variety as the landscape from which they come. In autumn, red and gold leaves announce the arrival of the game season and time to enjoy *brisolée*, a dish of chestnuts grilled over a wood fire and accompanied by the best mountain cheeses.

Valais, a land where culinary traditions and innovations of the highest quality blend to create pure pleasure.

## Wine and gastronomy – Top events

- Hérens national cow fighting championships, early May
- Open Cellar Days, early May (Ascension weekend)
- Alpine ascent of cattle, end of May to end of June
- Palp Festival in Martigny, July and August
- “Cycloportive des Vins du Valais” cycling event, 1 August (national holiday)
- Apricot festival in Saxon, early August (every 2 years)
- Swiss Food Festival in Zermatt, early August
- Vinea Sierre wine fair, early September
- Sierre-Salgesch vineyard hike, mid-September
- “Semaine du goût” and Swiss Wine Week, mid-September
- Bagnes, raclette capital, mid-September
- Alpine descent of cattle, September
- Foire du Valais trade fair in Martigny, early October
- Chestnut festival in Fully, mid-October
- Open Cellar Days in autumn and Advent, November and December
- Market of Flavours, Arts and Crafts in Martigny, December
- Grand Prix Joseph Favre in Martigny, December

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