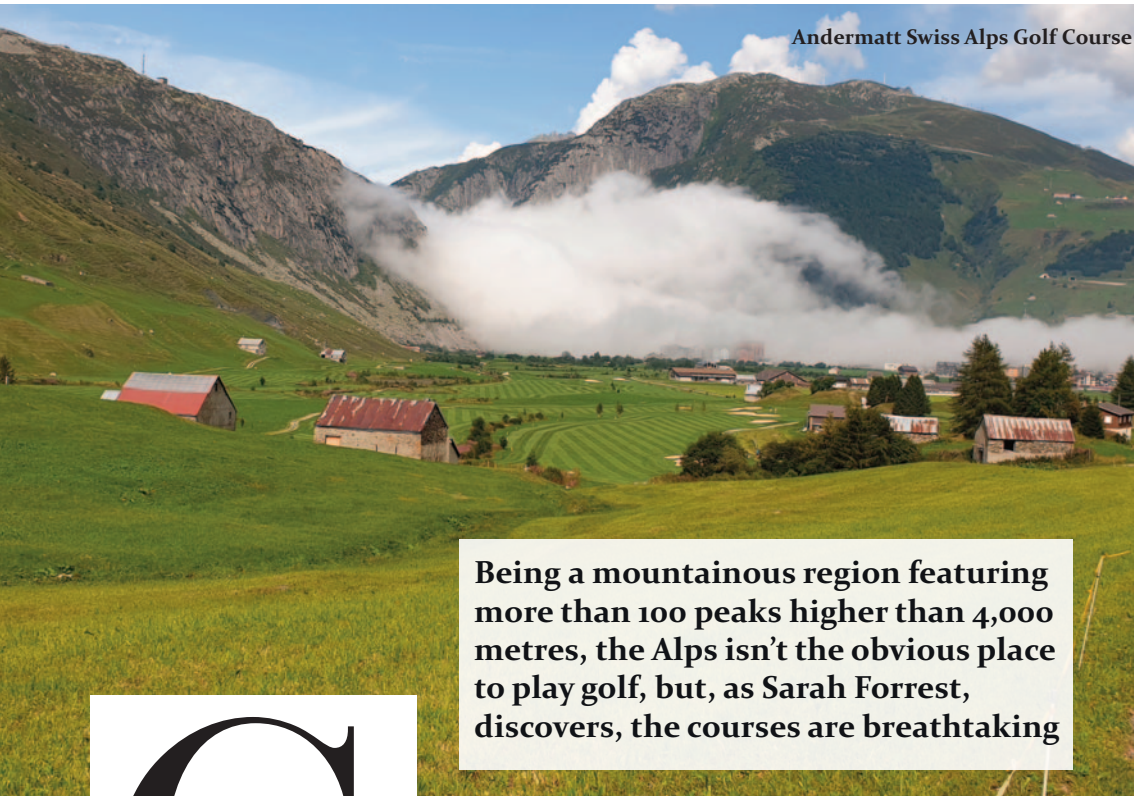


# Queen of the hill



Andermatt Swiss Alps Golf Course

**Being a mountainous region featuring more than 100 peaks higher than 4,000 metres, the Alps isn't the obvious place to play golf, but, as Sarah Forrest, discovers, the courses are breathtaking**

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olf in the Swiss Alps? With an easy flight to Zurich and then a just under two-hour transfer to Andermatt, it is quite achievable for a few days away.

Arriving at the Radisson Blu I was greeted and led to my apartment, rarely do I get the opportunity to be let loose on an apartment, but this one was stunning. The apartments are, in the main, privately owned but sub-let back to the Andermatt Swiss Alps property company, which was my host for the duration of my stay. My modern one-bedroom apartment had everything, just drop your bags and make yourself at home.

A coolish damp day started with breakfast in the Restaurant Biselli, where I met fellow journalists from the UK – from the start a friendship was formed.

This new part of Andermatt is a collection of alternatively-designed buildings whose architecture had been the product of many, creating an Alps village with a subtle nod to tradition; some may have window shutters, quirky building shapes or hazard looking zig-zag decorations, altogether quite new, quite



eclectic and quite refreshing.

A short 10-minute walk to the golf course is necessary by a turquoise green bubbling river. Then, like a slap in the face, it hits you, as you lift your head and gaze upwards at the shiny craggy grey mountains, and the narrow valley spread out in front of you. I'm in the Swiss Alps – playing golf! Andermatt course is a Kurt Rossknecht design, voted the best 18-hole course in Switzerland in 2018, and being likened to a Scottish-looking golf course; I was keen to give it a go.

It was damp, it was grey and it was stunning, not even the weather could dampen our spirits as we teed off on

hole one, a reasonably open par four with water down the left and with great expectations for the game ahead.

To be fair I'm probably downplaying the weather – it was downright miserable, but the course played brilliantly; the wet didn't hinder our game at all, even the greens were receptive to the ball and I was taken by surprise by how big they were – this certainly wasn't a course that had been squeezed in between a gap in the mountains!

Hole three threw up additional challenges playing from the forward tees and, being confronted with a steep bank directly up, no driver for me on that hole – I didn't feel there was enough space to get the ball high before it slammed into the hillside! I took a good three wood, teed slightly higher, with no room for error and a bunker guarding the green, I walked away with a par! Another hole of note was the par three downhill fifth hole, a massive drop down. My tee shot simply went flying past

the green and into a field at the back. Another lesson learnt that day ... altitude makes you ball go further!

The mountain hugging mist started to get a little more aggressive and was definitely in play. With this in mind an early lunch was called, with promises to return for the back nine afterwards. Great food at the Swiss House clubhouse and no signs of the rainy mist abating, we gave up late afternoon and hurried back to the apartments.

Accommodation in Andermatt is varied and offers the four-star Radisson Blu, the apartments and also the five-star Chedi hotel. With Thai influences all around the hotel, The Chedi doesn't blur into other buildings, it shouts its individuality from the hills, like Julie Andrews belting out 'the hills are alive'. Yes, it does clash with other buildings, yes it is among others close by, and yes it truly is a five-star appearance, welcome and restaurant. Dinner in the restaurant didn't disappoint either, with wine flowing and an obscene selection of food on offer. A classic cheese room, where the overpowering yet equally intoxicating smell battles with your senses of good versus bad smells.

Back to my apartment for another great night's sleep – seriously, I could live in the place, it was so comfortable, safe and peaceful.

Next day, and I'm alone, all other journalists had taken earlier flights but I wanted to see more golf and was offered Realp Golf. In fairness, one of the guys played it before I arrived, so I had an insight, but nothing really prepared me for what I saw at Realp.

Realp is better known for James Bond chasing down the almost 8,000 feet Furka Pass as Goldfinger goes about his leisurely business of side street shopping. While no secret agents were present that day, James was in my



Golfclub Andermatt Realp

heart as we took on those steep slopes to play golf and in places overlooking the hairpin bends he so elegantly took in his stride in that Aston Martin DB5.

Up and down the course I went; steep hill climbs and thought provoking shots down to small target greens, all with vista views to die for. Despite its gradients in all directions the course was simply immaculate. Playing with the assistant head greenkeeper enabled me to learn more about this unique course.

Buggies are available and the green staff have worked tirelessly to ready the course for the wider buggy tracks. Mind you, some of those paths are mini-Furkas, so be warned! The seventh is a short par three, downhill to a shallow green. I was warned not to overhit but to take a tight line left to let it bounce down and onto the green. Left and right don't always happen in the right order for me; this shot was no exception and I pitched straight on the green, and then off it, to hear my partner giggle under his breath and say 'its in the Alps!' A little lob shot to get it back onto the green for a par putt – which I missed but heard more giggles from my playing partner.

Another hole of note was the 18th. This is a nine-hole course, but, like other nine holes, there are alternative tee boxes to play 18. The 18th was hugely elevated by 55 feet to the small green, from the yellow tees. The ladies' tees were some way forward, so I played the yellow tees with a good crack of a three wood (not my favourite club) for this 196-yard hole. It landed short left, chip and a putt did give me a long-awaited par and a massive sense of achievement as I looked back at the tee box in the sky.

Summer in Andermatt is quite different to ski central, but what else can you do during the summer?

1. E-bikes – a relaxed way to see the Alps with pedal power and an engine to help on those hills!
2. Stream trains – there are many routes available to satisfy the eye with the beautiful landscape.
3. Guided walks – for the fitter ones amongst us!

#### TGB

*Sarah is a knowledgeable and well travelled freelance golf lifestyle journalist, marketer and new product business development specialist. Collaborations available.*

Email: [sarah@golfgurugroup.com](mailto:sarah@golfgurugroup.com)

Instagram: [sarah.forrest360golf](https://www.instagram.com/sarah.forrest360golf)