

Butterflies of the Swiss Alps

Naturetrek Tour itinerary

Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Fly Zürich and transfer by train to Wengen.
- Day 2/7** Butterfly & wildlife excursions from Wengen.
- Day 8** Transfer by train to Zürich and fly London.

Departs

June.

Focus

Butterflies, birds and other wildlife.

Grading

Day walks only. Grade B. Between 915 and 2,280 metres (though mostly by cable-car!).

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code CHE03) or see the current Naturetrek brochure.

Highlights:

- A general wildlife holiday focusing on butterflies
- Spectacular mountain scenery of the Bernese Oberland
- No road travel, all journeys by train & cable car
- Small family run hotel with unobstructed views of the Jungfrau
- Look for butterflies amongst the meadows & moraines at the foot of the Jungfrau
- False Heath, Cynthia's, Titania's & Mountain Fritillaries all possible
- Alpine Marmot & Ibex, plus White-winged Snow Finch & Ring Ouzel among other wildlife
- Led by expert naturalist guide



Top: Lauterbrunnen Valley, Titania's Fritillary & North Face of the Eiger. Images by David Tattersfield



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Introduction

In the heart of the spectacular Bernese Oberland, set high on a sheltered alp above the precipitous cliffs of the Launterbrunnen Valley, lies the idyllic Swiss village of Wengen. Backed by three of Europe's highest snowy peaks – the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau – Wengen sits at 1,163 metres and offers easy access to the enveloping panorama of jagged mountains and the flower-rich meadows, pastures and spruce forests at their feet. Botanists have been attracted to Wengen for many years to admire the carpets of alpines that burst into flower following the annual spring snowmelt. However, at the same time of year, as the sun slowly warms the mountain slopes, another equally colourful and delicate facet of the natural world - the butterflies - make their appearance and take flight.

To compliment our yearly botanical pilgrimage to the Swiss Alps, during this tour we turn our focus away from the colourful flora to the kaleidoscope of butterflies that flit and glide above. Naturally, we will not be ignoring the birds, mammals and other wildlife that live alongside the butterflies. On the contrary, this is a broad-focused wildlife tour perfect for those with an interest in all aspects of the natural world. It is also a holiday for anyone who loves to be on their feet, enjoying spectacular vistas and fresh mountain air, completely free from the shackles of a minibus ... all transport on this tour will be by train, cable-car and foot!



The trails around Wengen (by J. Stokes)

Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, it is likely that there will be some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour depending on the local weather conditions each day. This will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Wengen

We begin our holiday with a morning British Airways flight to Zürich, then transfer by train to Lauterbrunnen (changing at Bern and Interlaken en route). The final stage of our journey is by the exciting cogwheel mountain railway which climbs steeply up the impressive valley side to our destination of Wengen. We aim to arrive in Wengen mid to late afternoon and transfer to the comfortable, family-run Hotel Berghaus, a ten minute walk from the station and our base for the week. The rest of the day is free to explore the town or adjacent countryside. For those not wishing to waste any time, there are plenty of footpaths close to the hotel which lead out into the surrounding hay meadows and woodlands. Birds such as Fieldfare, Black Redstart and Nutcracker are frequently seen around the town.



Mountain views around Wengen (by J. Stokes)

Day 2

Wengen



Globeflowers (by J. Stokes)

From our ideally situated base, the day begins with a 1,000 metre cableway ascent to the Männlichen Station (2,230 metres), where one steps immediately into the true riches of the high alpine meadows. A short walk soon takes us to the Männlichen summit (2,343 metres) from where there are breathtaking views towards Interlaken far below. The rest of the day will take us southwards, along the upper path to Kleine Scheidegg. Butterflies to look out for if the weather is clear include Common Swallowtail, Alpine Grayling, Alpine Heath, Mountain Clouded Yellow and Baton Blue. At this time of year the upper slopes are still likely to be sprinkled in a colourful variety of alpine flowers including Globeflower, Spring Gentian, Trumpet Gentian, Moss Campion, Mountain Avens and many more. The brooding north wall of the Eiger is an ever dominant feature of the landscape and there are excellent views down to Grindelwald and Wengen far below. The walk will also introduce us to many of the

typical high altitude birds such as White-winged Snowfinch, Alpine Accentor, Alpine Chough, Citril Finch and Ring Ouzel. The Alpine Marmot is another common inhabitant of the high meadows and their piping call is one of the area's most familiar sounds. We return to Wengen by train.

Day 3

Wengen

Today we descend to Lauterbrunnen (796 metres), through meadows and spruce forests. This is also an exceptionally rich area for butterflies and birds and we may find such species as False Heath, Heath and Niobe Fritillaries, Black-veined White and Apollo along with Nutcracker, Red-backed Shrike, Firecrest and perhaps even



Dark Green Fritillary (by J. Stokes)

the elusive Black Woodpecker. The beautiful Martagon Lily should add a bit of botanical interest to the walk along with Herb Paris and Great Masterwort. On reaching Lauterbrunnen we will take the short bus journey to Trümmelbach, where we picnic by the river and look for Purple-shot Copper, Dark Green Fritillary and Osiris Blue, plus Red Kite, Dipper and Grey Wagtail. There will be time to visit the dramatic Trümmelbach Falls (at an additional cost of around ten Swiss Francs), where melt water from the mountain glaciers corkscrews down inside the vertical valley walls. Depending on the weather today, we may decide to pay a visit to nearby Stechelberg, and walk back down the valley from here.

On a sunny day this area abounds with butterflies, and we will take time to enjoy them before strolling back along the valley bottom to Lauterbrunnen and the now familiar cog-wheel railway, back to Wengen.

We will end the day with a short walk around the edge of the village after dark in search of a few of Switzerland's upland bat species such as Alpine Long-eared Bat, Savi's Pipistrelle and Northern Bat.

Day 4

Wengen

Today we will travel to the other side of Kleine Scheidegg and up the valley to Grindelwald First. This area is renowned for its high Alpine specialists, and we reach it by a scenic train ride through the valley, followed by an ascent by cable car up to 2168m. We plan to spend much of the day here, searching for high mountain specialties such as Mountain Green Veined White and Dewy Ringlets, plus Alpine Grizzled Skipper and Lessay's Brassy Ringlet.

After a picnic lunch we will walk a few hundred metres down the mountain through pastures where we will search for Small Apollo, Marsh Fritillary, Mazarine Blue, Marsh Fritillaries and a mixture of both Small Blues and Large Blue! At this altitude we can also be on the lookout for Alpine Marmots, listening first for their (hopefully now



Mazarine Blue (by J. Stokes)

familiar!) call. We will then take the cable car and train home to Wengen and may still have time to search the local meadows around the hotel for butterflies in the afternoon light.

Day 5

Wengen

Today we take the train up as far as Wengernalp. From here, we will enjoy a gentle walk down through colourful meadows, following by a fairly steep descent through open spruce forests to Biglenalp, a beautiful area overshadowed by the towering north face of the Jungfrau (4,158 metres). Here the grand mountain scenery is enhanced by such butterflies as Clouded and Small Apollos, Berger's Clouded Yellow, Mountain Green-veined White, Purple-edged Copper, Chapman's and Glandon Blues and a variety of fritillaries such as Titania's, Cynthia's and False Heath. The pale blue Alpine Columbine adds further colour to the scene, and - depending on the progression of the flowering season - we may be fortunate to find a late clump of Lady's Slipper Orchids. Both Ibex and Chamois are also frequently seen feeding on the steep lessgrassy slopes high above, whilst at the feet of the Jungfrau, amongst the patchwork of meadows and woodlands, we hope to find birds such as Common Crossbill, Citril Finch, Common Redpoll, Ring Ouzel, Raven and perhaps even Golden Eagle. The Alpine Salamander is another creature frequently seen in this area, especially in the damper regions close to streams. At Mettlanalp, we have the choice of either returning to Wengernalp to catch the train, or walking back to our hotel.



Lady's Slipper Orchid (by J. Stokes)

Day 6

Wengen

Mürren lies across the great Lauterbrunnen cleft obliquely opposite Wengen and the mountain views are, like the wealth of wildlife, quite stunning. We begin the day with a train journey to Grütschalp, from which we spend the morning walking through the mountain pastures and forests to Mürren. Along the way we will enjoy looking for the Fritillaries including False Heath, Heath, Pearl and Small Pearl, along with Geranium Argus, Alpine Heath, Clouded Apollo, beautiful Swallowtails, and Bright-eyed Ringlet. Round-headed Orchids, *Traunsteinera globosa*, are likely to be the botanical highlight of the morning, and birds that we may find here include Water Pipit, Fieldfare, Ring Ouzel, Black Redstart, Crested Tit, Citril Finch and Serin. Black Woodpecker is also possible (although they are heard more frequently than seen) and one very fortunate past group even found the rarest and most elusive of the region's woodpeckers, the Three-toed Woodpecker.



Alpine Blue (by J. Stokes)

After enjoying our picnic lunch, we will take the short train ride up to Almendhubel, where at 1900m we can look for some of the higher Alpine specialists, such as Alpine Blue. From here, we descend back to Wengen by train and cable car.

Day 7

Wengen

Today we will make another trip to the Grindelwald Valley, but rather than travelling through the valley, this time we plan to take the mountain train and enjoy a stunning journey right over Kleine Scheidegg and down the other side. From here, it is another short cable car ride to Grindelwald Borth, and we hope, more rarities in the form of Lesser Mountain Ringlet, Sudeten Ringlet and Adonis Blue, and Fritillaries such as Dark Green, High Brown, and Titania's. Descending to Grindelwald after lunch through the mountain pastures, Essex, Small, Silver Spotted and Carline Skippers are all possible, plus Marbled White and Chimney Sweeper moths. The cable car and ride home will allow us to revel in the stunning scenery of the area for one last time and if time permits we will have a look in the local meadows for species including Carline Skipper and Damon Blue.

Day 8

London

This morning we must sadly return by train through the beautiful Swiss countryside to Zürich. Our return flight home to London departs Zürich in mid-afternoon.

Grading

Grade B - Easy to moderately strenuous. We will be on foot, on mountain trails, for the best part of each day (please note that some of the trails are steep and rocky in places!), and will probably complete 3 to 5 miles on a typical days walk, though many options will be open to you, and you may therefore choose to do either more or less than the main party.

Our daily schedule

We usually rise for breakfast around 8 am and aim to leave our hotel no later than 9 am for a full day in the field. We break the day to relax and enjoy a picnic lunch, the carriage of which tends to be shared by the group members. We will aim to return to our hotel between 5 and 6 p.m., depending on the weather and our success in the field. This should allow a little time at the end of each day to relax, shower, and enjoy a drink before dinner.

After dinner, for those with energy remaining, your leader will be keen to run through the wildlife seen during the day, and discuss findings with you before retiring to bed.



Naturetrek Picnic Lunch

Focus

This is a general natural history holiday with a particular focus on the butterflies of the Bernese Oberland. Your guide will also, however, be very keen on showing the group the region's birds, mammals and plantlife, especially on any cool and overcast days when the butterflies are not on the wing.

Weather

Mountain weather is always variable, with cloud and rain (and even snow!) always a possibility. However, at this time of year, the weather should be becoming settled, with daytime temperatures ranging from 15 to 25°C, and plenty of clear sunny weather. However, at high altitudes, overcast conditions can rapidly reduce temperatures and snow is possible even at this time of year so waterproofs and a warm jacket should be carried at all times.

Food & accommodation

All meals and accommodation are included in the cost of this holiday except for lunches on Days 1 and 8 (i.e. whilst travelling to and from Wengen). We will be staying in the comfortable Hotel Berghaus in the delightful Swiss village of Wengen; all rooms have private facilities.

As shown, our hotel commands wonderful unobstructed views of the Jungfrau! Rooms with a balcony and views of the mountains are available at a supplement of £80 per person.



View from the Hotel Berghaus! (by D. Tattersfield)

How to book your place!

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

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