

BAZAAR

ESCAPE

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CONSUMER MAGAZINE
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*The view from the
flower garden at
Gravetye Manor*

HOME FROM HOME

Bazaar's favourite hotels in Britain and Ireland. Plus: a childhood story comes to life in the Swiss Alps; and Suki Waterhouse's Los Angeles



OVER THE HILLS AND FAR AWAY



Left: the view towards Gstaad.
Below: the bathroom of the Suite Etoile at Le Grand Bellevue

Inspired by her childhood love of *Heidi*, ANNA MURPHY discovers the delights of summer in the Swiss Alps, where magical wildflower meadows unfurl beneath heavenly skies

The valley lay far below bathed in the morning sun. In front of her rose a broad snow-field, high against the dark-blue sky... All around was a great stillness, only broken by soft, light puffs of wind that swayed the light bells of the blue flowers, and the shining gold heads of the cistus.'

I had dreamt of the Alpine meadows of *Heidi* ever since I read Johanna Spyri's classic as a child. I hadn't dared hope that they would be as wonderful as she suggested. Perhaps that is why it was decades before I finally travelled to Switzerland in the summer: I just couldn't bring myself to break the spell.

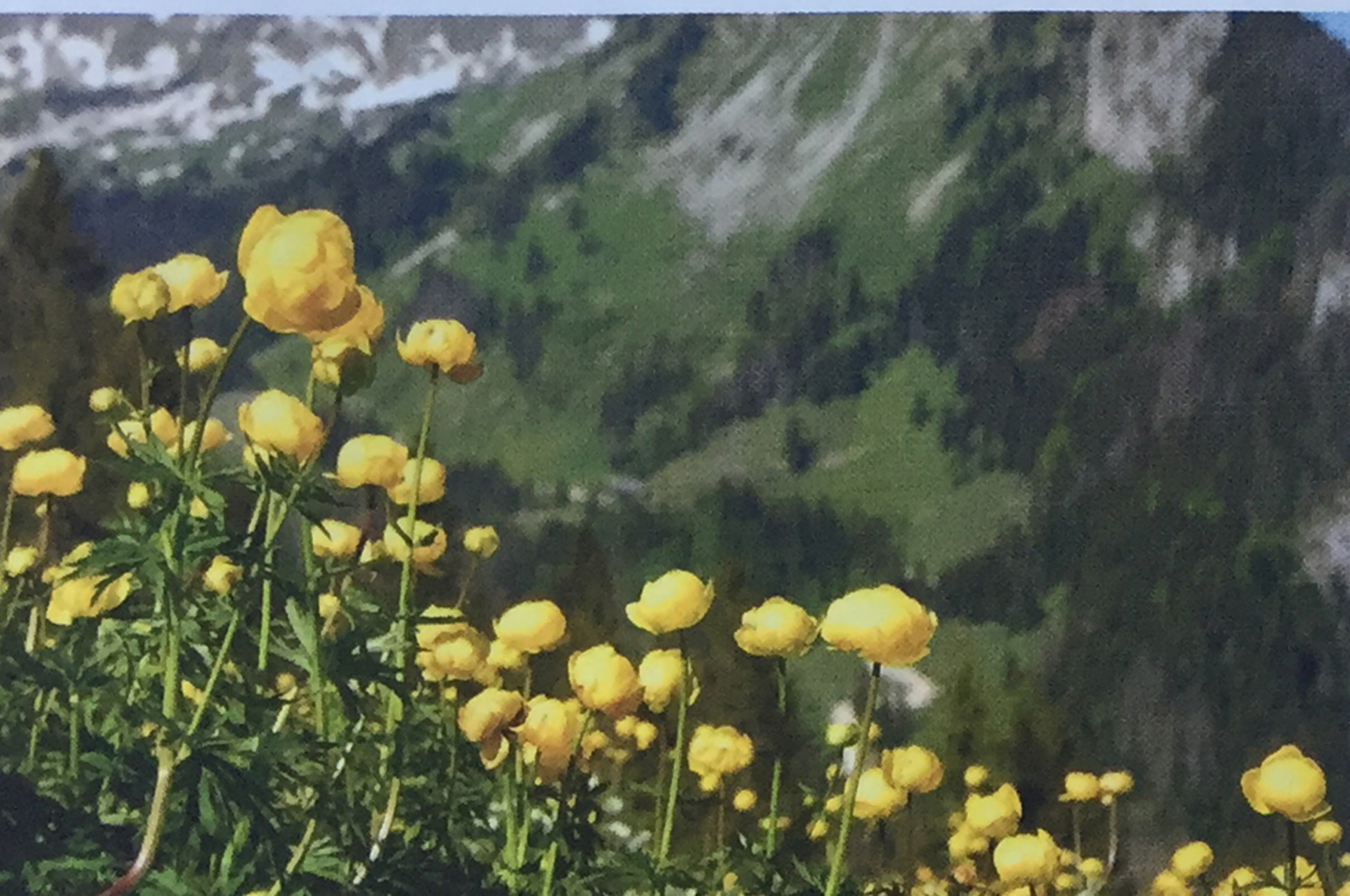
But at last I did, and the spell, I am thrilled to say, remains unbroken. The Swiss Alps in July are every bit as wonderful as in Spyri's novel, the slopes a dazzling green that, on closer inspection,

pixellates into a rainbow of blooms. ('This waving field of brightly coloured flowers.') There are Spyri's blue harebells and yellow rock rose in abundance, lilac scabious, red gentian, white sea campion, the largest heads of pink clover ever seen, and an encyclopedia's worth of other flowers besides.

Even before you arrive in Gstaad, as the Golden Pass train hauls you up the slopes from Montreux on the shores of Lake Geneva – surely one of the best rail journeys in the world – your breath has been definitively taken away. It was the completion of the then Montreux-Oberland railway in 1905 that first put the area on the tourist map, and some of the modern trains are still charmingly retro-styled.

What's more, away from the luxury environs of downtown Gstaad, with its designer shops (Cartier, Prada and Ralph Lauren to name but three), and expensive cars (vintage Porsches, Alfas and Bentleys abound, as well as the newer varieties), the mountain-scape seems pretty much unchanged since the 19th century.

Yes, there is the occasional chairlift to whisk you up to the top of a slope – an entirely good thing for us walkers (just ask the Swiss Alpsummer regular Theresa May). But otherwise this is still unadulterated *Heidi*-land: immaculate chalets dripping in geraniums; fir-trees casting witches'-hat shadows in the high-altitude





Left: the Suite Etoile.
Right: the turreted exterior of Le Grand Bellevue. Below right: the hotel's lounge

blaze; vertiginous shivers of snow far above, minuscule villages below; herds of cows and goats with bells round their necks, turning them into roving gamelan orches-

tras; clear streams and glittering waterfalls; midnight lakes generously reflecting back the stupendous white-capped peaks, just in case once wasn't enough; and finally, flowers, flowers, flowers. All that was missing was Peter the goatherd, but I couldn't help suspecting this was because I just hadn't looked hard enough for him.

It would have been difficult to persuade myself off the slopes and back to Gstaad if it weren't for where I was staying: one of the original It-hotels, Le Grand Bellevue opened just over a century ago – with the lovely wedding-cake architecture, complete with towers, to prove it – and was brought into this century with a pitch-perfect renovation in 2013.

The interiors now combine the contemporary with the classic, spliced with some lovely interludes of quirkiness, like the Brobdingnagian yellow Anglepoise that dwarves two similarly sunshine-hued chairs in the lounge, and surely the most impressive battalion of George Smith sofas in the world today, particularly the 17-metre leather Chesterfield that adorns the welcoming bar.

Then there's the state-of-the-art spa, where the British luxury lifestyle and beauty brand Bamford has recently introduced a revitalised new programme of skincare procedures. It has seven different heat-treatment rooms, including a cute Finnish sauna in a cabin outside, and some top-notch therapists. Not forgetting Leonard's restaurant, which has a Michelin star, and, at breakfast, serves a hazelnut-spiked bircher muesli that is the stuff of dreams. On the terrace, with a glass of Aperol spritz in hand, as the evening sun makes the mountains blush, I find myself lost for words at the perfection of it all.

Fortunately, I can use someone else's: 'And thus imperceptibly the day had crept on to its close... and the rocks above were beginning to shine and glow. All at once she sprang to her feet, 'Peter! Peter! everything is on fire! All the rocks are burning, and the great snow mountain and the sky!... O the beautiful, fiery snow!... Everything, everything is on fire!' □
Le Grand Bellevue, from about £315 a room a night B&B in summer and £525 half-board in winter (www.bellevue-gstaad.ch). Return flights to Geneva with Swiss start from £96 (www.swiss.com). Gstaad is two and a half hours away by train (from about £90 return). The hotel can arrange train tickets on request.



There are fir-trees casting witches'-hat shadows; shivers of snow far above; clear streams and glittering waterfalls

