

# Is this the most expensive hut in the world?

**T**he Gstaad Palace, Switzerland, is full of European royals, Greek ship owners and tuxedo-clad waiters. Liz Taylor loved it and so does Valentino. But

when people with kingdoms and Ferraris tire of socialising, dancing and the spa of all spas, they can pay a princely sum to stay in a mountain hut with an outside lavatory. A sliver of authenticity with petits fours. It's also on offer to non-residents. And, at £1,077 a night for two adults and two children, it's got to be pretty much the most expensive hut on the planet.

The Palace opened the Walig Hut last year as a summer alpine retreat — a place for the occasional meal or overnight stay for people who have everything and want something more. My teenage daughter and I are chauffeured in a Mercedes from the Palace to the Walig Hut. It saves hiking. Thirty minutes later we're above Gsteig at 1,700m — where the Alps touch God's toes and the air is as fresh as a peppermint.

Our hut is Heidi's shelter — a basic wooden dwelling. It was originally a 1786 home for farmers bringing their cattle to nearby pastures.

The views over the Saanenland are breathtaking. The hikes are even more so. Alpine cheese is produced in the only neighbouring hut — but on our visit it's closed as the farmer has taken his cattle across the valley. So we forage for mushrooms, accompanied by inquisitive alpine cattle.



Soon the setting sun makes the mountains blush a bridal pink. We enjoy solitude, silence and serenity.

We have a double bedroom (more Ralph Lauren than impecunious farmer), kitchen and dining room; and the snuggest of luxury duvets and sheepskins strewn over chairs.

But my daughter almost faints when she finds that there's no internet, fax or phone reception. And get this — there's only intermittent solar-powered electricity... and

torches; an outside latrine, that's more glamping than Gstaad; and freebie Molton Brown shower gel... but no bath or shower. Drinks cool in our fridge, a mountain stream. Pass my dirndl and lederhosen.

Soon we become Girl Guides, collecting eau de la montagne, stoking our log fire and boiling water on a wood-burning stove. But only because we don't want our manservant to do it. To avoid too much reality, the Palace's regal touch is brought to the hut.

Meet Maurizio Paglino, the hotel's über-charming head waiter.

He serves us a delicious three-course dinner: smoked hams, vacherin fondue and fruit flans. Afterwards, he scarpers in his white van. Then the silence is so loud, it rings in our ears, along with cows and their bells playing the music of the Alps. Soon the sky fills with a million stars.

I sleep fitfully. Then dawn breaks and the snow-peaked mountains opposite my bedroom window change hues of blues obligingly, like an alfresco cinema show.

This rustic Walig accommodation does fulfil my need for escape from our overly connected world. And I know some like it hut. But I'm more to the Palace born.

**Caroline Phillips**

## Need to know

An alpine night for two adults and up to two children, including a three-course dinner, costs from £1,077 (CHF 1,600). Book on 00 41 33 748 50 00. Flights are available on Swiss (08456 010956, swiss.com) from £89 return.

**More information**  
swisstravelsystem.co.uk  
or gstaad.ch