



Romainmôtier is home to one of Switzerland's oldest monasteries. Clockwise from top right: downtown Yverdon; Route du Vignoble; paddleboarding on Lake Neuchâtel



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SWITZERLAND Scenic discoveries

With mountains framing medieval villages and jewel-coloured waters, Northern Vaud is Switzerland in microcosm. Words: Kerry Walker

Lying only an hour's drive north of Geneva amid the Jura Mountains, Northern Vaud's chiselled limestone peaks and fir forests spill down into turquoise Lake Neuchâtel. Less mentioned in guidebooks than its better-known neighbours, this serene region has long drawn visitors from Switzerland and neighbouring France. They come for its blend of landscapes, history and viticulture. Whether you're looking to visit noble castles, lounge by the water or pedal through vineyards, here's how you can in Switzerland's most scenic, untapped corner.

What to see

At the lake's southern tip, Yverdon-les-Bains catapults you back to the Middle Ages. Begin by exploring its historic centre, a fetching tangle of lanes lined with pastel-painted facades and cobbled, cafe-rimmed squares. At its heart is 13th-century Château d'Yverdon, a castle built for Peter of Savoy. East of town, the Clendy Menhirs is one of the country's most compelling Neolithic sites — a mysterious alignment of 45 standing stones have rested here for 6,000 years.

Further north is the medieval lakeside stronghold, Château de Grandson. Switzerland's second largest castle has stood for over 1,000 years and its newly renovated museum zooms in on the castle's role in the 15th-century Burgundian Wars.

Clasped between wooded hills to the west, Romainmôtier is a timewarp hamlet on the banks of the Nozon River. A beauty in local limestone, the village grew around Switzerland's oldest abbey, founded in 450 CE. Feel the pulse of the past as you ponder medieval frescoes in its Romanesque church.

What to do

In the balmy months, Lake Neuchâtel comes to life on the edge of Yverdon-les-Bains' powder-sand beach. The Romans raved about the healing powers of the town's thermal waters, which you can plunge into at the Centre Thermal. The centre's indoor pools and adjoining hotel are set to reopen in 2027 after revamp, but you can still splash in the two heated lidos.

Nearby Yvonand's tree-flanked beaches invite relaxation. Hire a canoe or paddleboard at the surf centre to explore the lake at a leisurely pace. Skimming the southern shoreline, Grande Carrière nature reserve is among Switzerland's lesser-known treasures — 7,413 acres of bird-tenanted wetlands and woodlands ripe for discovery by guided canoe

tour, bike or hike. For a more a challenging scramble, take on 1,608-metre Le Chasseron in the Jura range. Beginning in Sainte-Croix, the seven-and-a-half-mile circuit crosses forests and pastures, with views of the Alps, Lake Neuchâtel and Lake Geneva.

What to eat and drink

In the village of Bonvillars, vines climb the foothills of the Jura Mountains. Walk or cycle the Route du Vignoble, a 12.5-mile loop starting in Grandson, ticking off pretty wine-making villages like Concise and Champagne (not to be confused with its French counterpart). For tastings of merlot and gamay reds or chasselas whites, visit Cave des Viticulteurs de Bonvillars or Vignoble Cousin wineries.

Local wines can be paired with regional AOP cheeses like Gruyère and Vacherin Mont-d'Or. Learn how they're made at the Fromagerie Tyrode factory in the mountain village of L'Auberson, or pick some up from the fromagerie in the nearby town of Bullet. Higher up the slopeside, Chalet de la Grandsonnaz-dessus serves Gruyère fondues amid the alpine pasture. Or dig into cider-laced fondues with views of Mont Blanc at 1,450-metre Chalet des Avattes.

Where to stay

Yverdon-les-Bains is a springboard for exploring Northern Vaud. For close by access to the Centre Thermal, stay at the charming four-star Hôtel La Prairie, which opened in 1840 to host visitors drawn to Lake Neuchâtel's thermal waters. Nearer the station and fringing the old town, Hôtel du Théâtre blends modern comfort with original 19th-century features. The pick of the peaceful garden rooms have private terraces and there's an inner courtyard for breakfast when the sun's out.

PLAN YOUR TRIP

Direct flights are available from several UK airports to Geneva Airport. Onward trains connect to Yverdon-les-Bains in just over an hour, changing in Renens VD. An efficient train and bus service makes getting around Lake Neuchâtel and its surrounding towns and villages easy, but a car can be useful for venturing further into the Jura Mountains. For more information, visit yverdonlesbainsregion.ch



Yverdon-les-Bains
Région