

# 8 Spectacular Mountain Villages You've Never Heard Of

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Earth is punctuated by more than a million mountains. Along their slopes, many historic villages and quaint towns have taken shape over the centuries, attracting residents and visitors alike for their crisp air, stunning scenery, and opportunities for outdoor recreation. Seeking a high-altitude destination for your next vacation? Check out these lesser-known — but no less spectacular — mountain villages around the world, from Colorado to Morocco.

## Ouray, Colorado



Easily Colorado's best-kept secret, this historic former mining outpost is perhaps better known today as the little "Switzerland of America." Nestled in the San Juan Mountains, an hour's drive from glitzy Telluride, Ouray offers meandering old wagon trails, rushing waterfalls and rivers,

imposing peaks, and steep trails. The nearby hot springs are also a can't-miss attraction — and the perfect way to relax after a day of trekking and exploring.

## **Fernie, British Columbia**



At the foot of the Rocky Mountains, this vibrant Canadian town provides access to miles of groomed ski slopes in winter, while in the warmer months, visitors can explore hiking trails, fly fishing, and spectacular foliage. The historic downtown area is picturesque and lined with restaurants and bars where you can unwind after a day of outdoor adventure. Art and culture are a big draw in Fernie, too, with the Fernie Museum showcasing the town's history, the annual Fernie Mountain Film Festival taking place each winter, and the seasonal Arts Station offering exhibits and workshops.

## **Las Leñas, Argentina**





This Argentine resort town boasts the largest skiable terrain in South America that's reachable by land — more than 43,000 acres of hair-raising slopes. Snow-lovers and thrill-seekers will want to visit between June and September, when the powder falls in buckets here. Outside of the winter months, though, the climate tends to be dry and warm for a mountain retreat, making Lenas a great place to relax away from crowded cities. (Buenos Aires is located about 750 miles to the east.) The town includes a new adventure park with an impressive zip line and suspended wooden bridges, as well as the Piscis Hotel, one of the highest-elevation casinos in the world.

## **Vipiteno, Italy**



Surrounded by the dramatic Dolomites, the ancient hamlet of Vipiteno (also known as Sterzing) is as charming as they come. Tucked into the German-speaking region of northern Italy called South Tyrol, Vipiteno dates back to the Middle Ages, when it served as a refuge for emperors and royalty. Today, this alpine hideaway still retains its rich culture and history. Zwolferturm, an impressive pointed clock tower in the center of town, marks the divide between the New Town and the Old, where colorful houses and enticing shops and restaurants line the narrow streets. Vipiteno offers the best of both worlds: gothic churches and medieval castles alongside world-class hiking, skiing, and sledding trails.

## **Hallstatt, Austria**





Reachable only on foot or by boat, Hallstatt, nestled in the Austrian Alps, is full of surprises once you get there. The arresting lake and mountain scenery surrounding this Bronze Age town presents a fairy-tale scene, punctuated by the warm golden-yellow and red tones of the meticulously maintained buildings that make up the village. Here, you'll encounter hotels which date back a century or more, artisans selling handcrafted wooden toys at the old market, and the smells of local sausage and schnitzel seeping from the many cozy restaurants in town. Even more memorable are the views — take in the impressive panorama from the town's Skywalk or on a boat tour. Hallstatt is also home to one of the world's oldest salt mines — now a UNESCO World Heritage Site that dates back to prehistoric times.

## **Gimmelwald, Switzerland**



Perched high in the Swiss Alps, Gimmelwald is one of Switzerland's last car-free havens, reachable only on foot, by cable car, or by hiking through the lush green valley surrounding this bucolic village. It's worth the trek, as the views of the surrounding Bernese Oberland mountainsides — including the famous snow-capped Jungfrau, Aletsch, and Bietschhorn peaks — definitely don't disappoint. Dotted with traditional wooden chalets, the town offers an appealingly slow pace, as if locked in time. Hiking, biking, climbing, and paragliding are favorite activities in warmer months — in addition to local cheese and chocolate tasting, naturally.

## **Chizu, Japan**





Located in the Tottori prefecture, about two hours by train from Kyoto or Osaka, this Japanese retreat is noteworthy for its peaceful Chugoku mountain scenery and sprawling surrounding forests, said to hold mystical appeal. Here, towering trees rise up into a dense green canopy, while meandering streams run through their shadows, giving off a distinctly Zen feeling to this corner of Japan. Farmhouses and rice paddies dot the surrounding countryside, while on the town's charming streets, you'll find a mix of vibrant markets and festivals and enchanting history — the Bujoji Temple dates back over a thousand years. Around the Chizo train station, a historic Showa-era district and visitor center welcome travelers.

## **Ifrane, Morocco**



When you think of North Africa, mountain villages may not come to mind, but the sprawling Atlas range in Morocco might change your perspective. Near the tip of the African continent, perched at nearly 5,500 feet above sea level, the historic town of Ifrane offers memorable views of the sometimes-snow-capped peaks. A small train shuffles visitors through town, where artisans sell Berber rugs, tapestries, and blankets made from locally sourced wool and bright natural dyes. Around Ifrane, hiking trails beckon, and for those less inclined to tackle these rocky slopes on foot, donkey or mule rides are readily available. While the area was first settled in the 16th century, this town has a more modern foundation, erected during the French occupation in the 1920s as a cool mountain escape from the heat of the cities and desert.