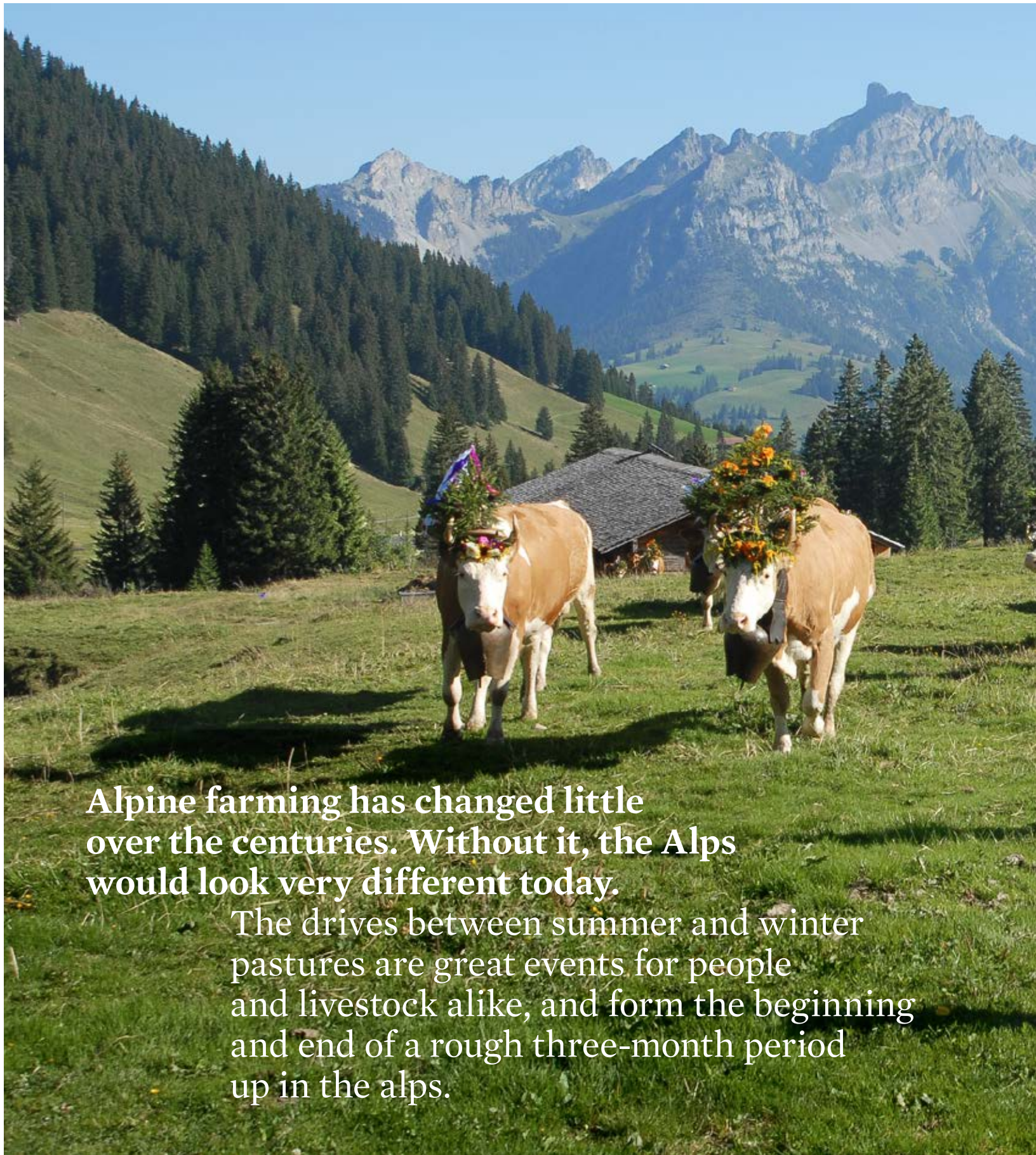


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# Gstaad Palace JOURNAL







Alpine farming has changed little over the centuries. Without it, the Alps would look very different today.

The drives between summer and winter pastures are great events for people and livestock alike, and form the beginning and end of a rough three-month period up in the alps.





GSTAAD

INSIDE









# A

A widely audible shout, an inward cheer. What joy to be up here! The people and animals are back on the alps of the Bernese Oberland. From the Saanenland to the Oberhasli region, life is re-entering several hundred alpine huts. Smoke is rising from the chimneys. White cloths, in which the young cheeses are wrapped for a day, are drying in the sun. Spring in the mountains. The cows are knee-deep in grass and can hardly get enough of it. In the next three months, the alpine meadows will offer our

four-legged friends a wide variety of flowers and herbs. From today, the monotonous hum of the milking machine will break the silence every morning and evening. A few days after the transhumance (the trek to or from the alps), the cows will resolutely trot from outdoors, where they spent the night, to their place in the cowshed. The animals give off steam; the air in the cowshed is warm and humid. Alpine resident Ernst binds up the cows' tails and cleans the bulging udders before getting the valuable alpine milk from them and transporting it in vats to the dairy.

A crackling fire under the cheese vat starts the cheese-making process. Caseation of the milk is like a ritual, every part of which has been rehearsed thousands of times. Depending on the size of the alp and the head of livestock, the cheese vat can contain between 500 and 1000 litres of milk. Accurate temperature control, clean work and precise hand movements are essential when removing the cheese, putting it into the round mould, and pressing it. A day later, the young cheeses are placed into brine for a few hours and then into the cheese cellar, where they are stored in a mouse-free environment and tended to daily. Bernese mountain cheese ripens from the inside out and gets its golden colour from being smeared with brine every day.

An alpine summer offers spring, summer, autumn and a hint of winter – all within three months. As the bearded alpine shepherd with 50 alpine summers behind him once said: “For me there’s no better life than being with my animals in the mountains.”



Briefly enjoy the sun, listen to the concert of cowbells, with a blade of grass in your mouth. A whoop: what joy, what freedom! Spectacular nature – the enjoyable alpine way of life.





In the alps, ground is fenced off, cows are milked, cheese and butter made, and manure shovelled. From morning to night, often until late.







No matter how labour-intensive this time is, how energy-consuming the day's work, how inhospitable working outside in bad weather at altitudes between 1100 m and 1800 m, the daily feeds, the search for fallen animals and their care, all that hard work is forgotten when the grazed pastures no longer yield enough food and the departure from the alpine pastures is wistfully planned.

Helpers bring autumn flowers from the valley. Deft hands bind them to small fir trees from the pastures. A final prayer before the communal breakfast, the thanks for a good summer on the mountain. The "treicheln" (cow bells) are tied round the cows' necks and the floral decorations fastened between the horns. Now there's no stopping the animals. With as much pleasure as they went up the alps, so they are drawn back down into the valley. The alpine residents also look forward to a quieter, more regular time on their home patch.

But hardly have they arrived in the valley than they start anticipating the next alpine summer. They have memories of the nocturnal tinkling of the grazing herd, of the play of light across the mountains, the sky and the clouds, the sunsets and the view of the starry sky after all that work. An anticipation, which increases during the winter months, becomes an "alpine fever". The last remnants of snow melt away too slowly for the alpine residents of the Bernese Oberland; they can barely wait for the pastures to turn green and flower.

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**About a hundred Alpine farms**

During the alpine summer, around a hundred mountains around Gstaad have cattle on them. The alps are larger than in the rest of the Oberland area and often belong to partnerships, foundations, communities, municipalities and even private individuals. In many chalets, traditional cheeses are made over an open fire. This is where the rich local range of Saanenland's Alpine and Hobelkäse ("slicing cheese") comes from.

**Celebrate authentic festivals**

During the season from mid-June to mid-September, traditional alpine festivities, to which guests are very welcome, take place. These include the cattle drives up and down the alps, Suufsunntige ("drinking Sundays"), the Chilbi fun fair, the annual county fair and the livestock awards and auctions. These festivals are the epitome of authentic alpine culture and offer guests a memorable Saanenland experience.