

The village of Lavey and its SPA in Lavey-les-Bains

Lavey is located in Switzerland in the canton of Vaud. The town became famous for its SPA. It was already known to the Romans in ancient times and was rediscovered by chance in 1831. Thanks to the SPA, Lavey became a spa resort. Today Lavey-les-Bains has a modern thermal bath, a hotel and a medical centre. Lavey lies east of the Rhone, opposite Saint-Maurice, between the Dents du Midi Massif to the west and the Dent de Morcles Massif to the east. To the east there is a narrow valley, where the SPA of Lavey-les-Bains is located and from which the steep rocky slopes of the Dent de Morcles, partly covered by forest, rise up to 2969 metres.

At first sight, Lavey is not very attractive.

If you come from Lake Geneva and leave Aigle and Bex behind you, you will find Lavey just before the Saint-Maurice narrow pass on the eastern side of the valley, i.e. on the right bank of the Rhone. There, where the rock comes very close to the river and blocks the way and the railway, cantonal road and motorway on the Valais side have to find their way through the narrow gap in the mountain. Between Lake Geneva (Lac Léman) and Saint-Maurice, the Rhone has formed the cantonal borders since time immemorial: Valais on the western shore, Vaud on the eastern; after Saint-Maurice lies the canton Valais.

This means that Lavey is still in Vaud and forms the last narrow corner of the canton of Vaud, surrounded by Valais territory. The thermal bath is located at the end of a rural cul-de-sac, wedged between river and rock, which rises from 400 to almost 3000 metres above sea level. So here, as a Swiss saying goes, you literally find yourself "in a hole".

The almost southern looking landscape.

But the first impression is deceptive. Because if you get out at the entrance of the thermal bath and walk through the park that stretches for a few hundred metres between the Rhone and the mountain, you discover a charming strip of land with a view to the old royal city of Saint-Maurice. The way through the park leads to a beautiful old chapel, where a biblical quote reminds you of the strength of the Bible - after all, you are in the Vaud -, and then the path follows the rushing river up to the old bath house, in whose vicinity the SPA originates.

Where the adventure of Lavey-les-Bains once began.

In the old days, you could drink warm and sulphur-smelling water at a washbasin. Unfortunately this is no longer possible today. Behind the bathhouse, in a small wood, vapours rise from the ground. This is where the adventure of Lavey-les-Bains once began.

A sulfurous hot SPA.

From the SPA of Lavey, which is tapped at 600 meters below the ground, water with a temperature of 65 degrees bubbles to the surface. Lavey has the warmest SPA in Switzerland, and it actually is a "hyper thermal water", so to speak.

The SPA of Lavey: already known to the Romans in antiquity, buried and rediscovered.

The SPA was already known to the Romans in antiquity, as various chronicles report. But it was buried by an earthquake. The rediscovery of the SPA, which had fallen into oblivion after the earthquake, dates from 27 February 1831. At that time a fisherman who laid out his traps in the Rhone made a surprising discovery. When he stomped out into the river, he noticed that the water was getting warmer, even hotter. He told the story, and shortly afterwards the director of the neighbouring Saline Bex in Vaud came to investigate. He then discovered that a warm, sulfurous SPA was indeed bubbling out of the rock on the banks of the Rhone.

From the rediscovery of the hot SPA to the thermal bath

After the rediscovery a thermal bath was built, which was quite successful, especially in the second half of the 19th century, when the railway lines were laid through the Rhone valley and spa guests and transit travellers came to the area. But the remote location of Lavey limited its development. The canton of Vaud, as the owner of the thermal bath, was not particularly active in marketing it. At the end of the 1990s, the loss-making company was finally sold to the French Eurotherm Group, which operates thermal baths in France and Belgium. Today, the thermal bath is flourishing again.

Reviving forgotten drinking cures with sulfur water

Since 2019 Tethys, the drink with natural sulfur iodine water from Lavey-les-Bains in Switzerland, is bottled on site in glass bottles and marketed.