

# Condé Nast Traveller



## Is yodelling the wackiest wellness trend of 2026?

Stephanie Gavan embarks on a wellness break with a difference as she yodels her way through the Swiss Alps

There is a specific high that comes with outrunning your own limiting beliefs – a chase that has previously landed me in an Austrian fasting clinic, on a half-marathon start line in **Madrid**, and sitting ten days of silent meditation in the English countryside. But even I, a glutton for punishingly offbeat **wellness trends**, would have laughed you out of the juice bar had you told me a year ago that I'd soon be yodelling my way to self-improvement. Before now, my exposure to the ancient art form was limited to Domino's adverts and Julie Andrews' vocal aerobics in *The Sound of Music*. But sparked by the UNESCO decision to grant yodelling Intangible Cultural Heritage status back in December 2025, I checked into Gstaad grand dame, **Le Grand Bellevue Hotel**, to discover if this whimsical Swiss warbling could be Europe's most slept-on biohack.



Dubbed by yodelling professor Nadja Räss as the nation's fifth language, the 'call of the cowherd' dates back to the 1500s, when Alpine herders used yodelling to call cattle across vast distances. This functional tool was formalised with the founding of the Federal Yodelling Association in 1910 and, by the mid-20th century, had become a pillar of **Switzerland's** 'spiritual national defence', a cultural push to fortify Swiss identity against rising European fascism. While the tradition eventually receded, it has since found its second wind; today, there are 17,000 active yodellers and over 700 clubs keeping the hills of Switzerland very much alive.



Practitioners cite a litany of good-for-you perks, from stress relief and cognitive stimulation to improved lung capacity. So, when I rocked up at Gstaad's St. Niklaus Chapel (by horse-drawn carriage, no less), my expectations were understandably high. I was there to meet Anita Hefti, a seasoned yodelling instructor who treats the art form with the holistic rigour of a Himalayan yogi. "Yodelling stimulates the body from the ground up," she tells me, slipping off her shoes to reveal white-socked feet, which she splays and shifts to find her centre. "You must relax the toes to hold the power in the chest." This physical fluidity carries into her demonstration, where she uses the glottal stop to somersault seamlessly between a crystalline 'head' voice and a deeper 'chest' voice.



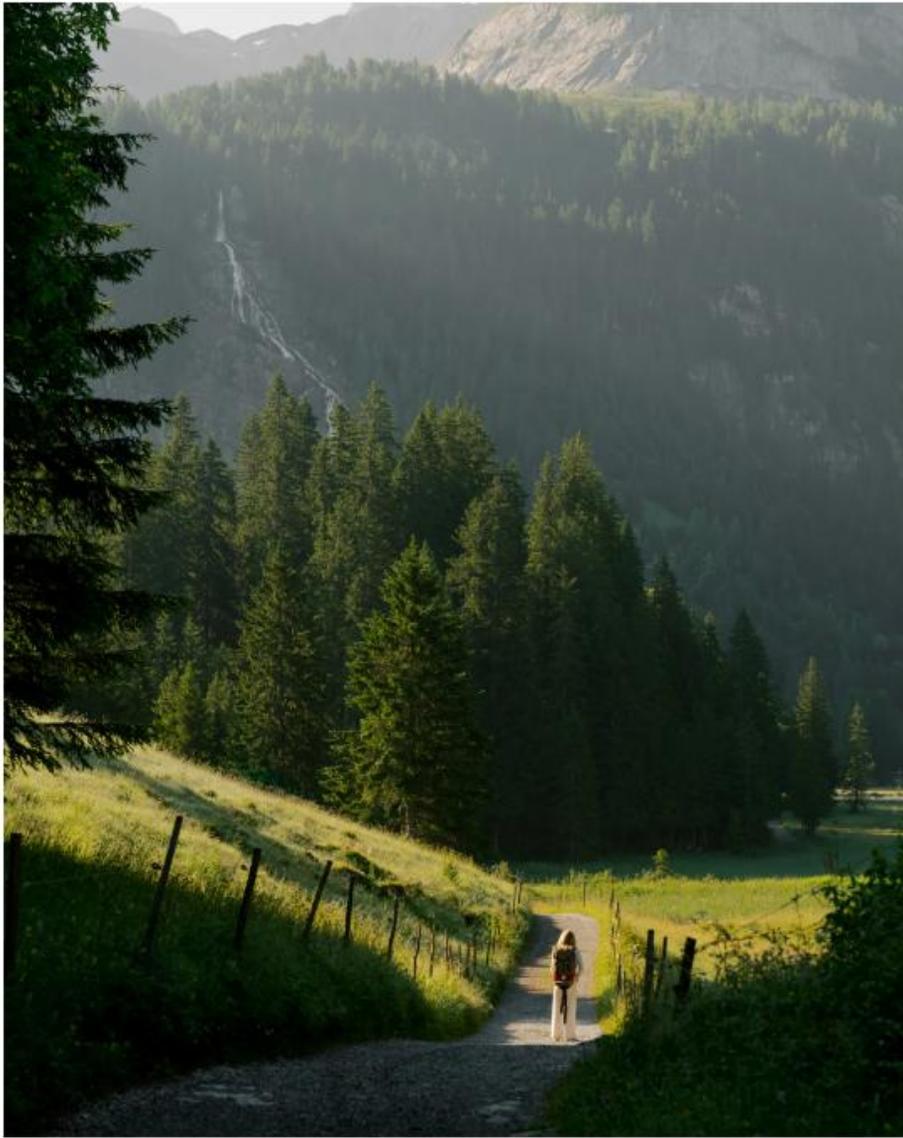
It's this detail which sets yodelling apart. While pop and jazz favour the 'belt' of the chest voice, and opera strives to smooth both registers together, yodelling celebrates the break between them. As it turns out, there's science behind this, too. Neuroscientist Dr Stephen Porges has long documented how melodic vocalisations – specifically the dynamic pitch shifts of yodelling – can stimulate the vagus nerve, helping to calm the nervous system, lower cortisol levels, boost endorphins, and promote a sense of safety. Think of it as a self-generated **sound bath**, or a deep internal massage.



Contemporary yodeller Simone Felber compares this to the self-healing mechanism of a cat's purr. "The vibrations relax them," she explains, "and this is what happens with yodelling - you create these specific vibrations with your own air and your own vocal folds. I'm convinced this has a profound impact on the body." This likely explains the visceral reactions Anita witnesses in her workshops. She tells me of a mother and daughter who were left teary-eyed and embracing by the end of their session. "It can be a very touching experience, very emotional," Anita says. By overriding your 'fight or flight' response, yodelling can trigger a raw, emotional release. "It is good for your soul," Anita explains when I enquire further. "If I have a bad day, it's always yodelling that grounds me."



For someone who hates public speaking (never mind singing), yodelling presents another challenge. But as I soon discover, *oob-ing* and *ay-ing* my way through Anita's vocal warm-ups, there is no room for ego or preciousness. The practice demands finding peace with imperfection – and the high probability of sounding, at least initially, like a strangled seagull. There is no breathy, Lana Del Rey-style whispering to hide behind; no shoe-gazing mumbles. Yodelling is loud and uncompromising. My novice transitions are clunky and my untrained lungs frequently give out. Still, by the time our session concludes, embarrassment has been replaced by a giddy surge of energy that leaves me skipping back to Le Grand Bellevue with a wholesome, Heidi-esque grin. It's a phenomenon Simone Felber witnesses frequently when conducting her choir. "They often arrive tired and unmotivated," she notes, "but by the end of rehearsal, they tell me they could run a 10k."



Beyond the personal benefits, there's the unifying power of being part of a collective. "Singing in groups has such a positive effect on people," Simone continues. "There is this sense of community — you reach a goal together, and when you see that the audience is moved, you realise that it impacts them too." This sentiment is echoed by Rolf Christen, president of the Bernese Cantonal Yodelling Association. For him, yodelling became an anchor during a difficult life transition 16 years ago. "Singing with my bandmates gave me a welcome distraction and valuable support," he recalls. "It offered a few hours that took me away from the dreary everyday and provided a sense of belonging when I needed it most." Similarly, this sense of community is precisely what drew in Mike von Grünigen, a farmer's son who only took up yodelling at age 50. "I was drawn to it because it felt like something I had been missing for a long time," he says. "I love the sense of peace it gives me. It helps me reduce stress, reconnect with myself, and bring a bit of joy and passion into every day of my life."



Back at Le Grand Bellevue, I sink into the lounge's fireside sofa, nursing my well-worn vocal cords with a velvety hot chocolate. "There is an authenticity to yodelling which is hard to beat," the hotel's owner, Daniel Koetse, reflects, "it allows guests to immerse themselves in the soul of the region." As I watch the shadows stretch across the slopes outside, it occurs to me that there's a reason these ancient practices – yoga, meditation, *yodelling* – persist: they work. But for a tradition to stay alive, it must also be shaped for the future, which is precisely what contemporary practitioners like Simone Felber hope to achieve with her contemporary yodelling practice and work alongside the feminist choir *Eccho vom Eierstock*. The tradition is broadening elsewhere, too, notably with *Jodlerklub Männertreu Suisse* – the first yodelling choir for gay men, who perform under the punchy slogan: Where gays *jodeln*.



I leave Switzerland the next day, content in the realisation that wellness needn't be such a solemn endeavour. This is, after all, a place where they serve you chocolate after a spa treatment. For all yodelling's science-backed benefits, I'm left thinking that silliness — especially when shared — may be the best biohack of all. Who knew squawking like a panicked bird in a drafty stone chapel could be so liberating? And while it's unlikely my breathless calls will command anything more than a passing housefly, I'm not losing sleep. Recent studies suggest that monkeys have a better knack for it, anyway; so if I'm still clunking my way through the *oob*-ings and *ay*-ings a year from now, there's evolution to blame.