

# The Best of Switzerland

**P**resumably you're visiting Switzerland to relax and have a good time, and you don't want to waste precious vacation hours searching for the best deals and experiences. So take us along and we'll do the work for you. Throughout our years traveling in Switzerland, we've tested the best lakeshores, reviewed countless restaurants, inspected hotels ranging from remote alpine inns to luxurious city palaces, and sampled the best skiing, mountain climbing, and hiking. We've even learned where to get away from it all when you want to escape the crowds. The following is a very personal, opinionated list of what we consider to be the best Switzerland has to offer.

## 1 The Best Travel Experiences

- **Hiking the Swiss Mountains:** From the time the snows melt in spring until late autumn when winds blow too powerfully, visitors head for the country's alpine chain to hike its beautiful expanses. Well-trodden footpaths through the valleys and up the mountains are found in all the resorts of Switzerland. Hiking is especially enjoyable in the Ticino and the Engadine, but quite wonderful almost anywhere in the country. You'll find fewer visitors in some of the less-inhabited valleys, such as those in the Valais. Every major tourist office in Switzerland has a free list of the best trails in their area. If you go to one of the area's local bookstores, you can purchase topographical maps of wilderness trails.
- **Viewing Castles & Cathedrals:** There is so much emphasis on outdoor sports in Switzerland that many visitors forget that it's rich in history and filled with landmarks from the Middle Ages. Explore at random. Visit the castle at Chillon where Lord Byron wrote *The Prisoner of Chillon*. Or Gruyères, which everyone knows for the cheese, but is also the most craggy castle village of Switzerland, complete with dungeon and spectacular panoramic views. Both Bern and Basel have historic Münsters of cathedrals—the one in Bern dates from the 14th century. Among the great cathedrals, St. Nicholas's Cathedral, in the ancient city of Fribourg near Bern, dominates the medieval quarter, and Schloss Thun, on Lake Thun in the Bernese Oberland, was built by the dukes of Zähringen at the end of the 12th century.
- **Joining the Revelers at Fasnacht (Basel):** Believe it or not, Switzerland has its own safe and very appealing version of Carnival, which dates back to the Middle Ages. It begins the Monday after Ash Wednesday (usually in late Feb or early Mar). The aesthetic is heathen (or pagan), with a touch of existentialist absurdity. The horse-drawn and motorized parades are appropriately flamboyant, and the cacophonous music that accompanies the spectacle includes the sounds of

fifes, drums, trumpets, and trombones. As many as 20,000 people participate in the raucous festivities, which may change your image of straight-laced Switzerland. See “Basel” in chapter 6.

- **Summitting Mount Pilatus:** The steepest cogwheel train in the world—with a 48-degree gradient—takes you to the top of Mount Pilatus, a 2,132m (6,993-ft.) summit overlooking Lucerne. Once at the top you'll have a panoramic sweep that stretches all the way to Italy. Until the 1600s it was forbidden to climb this mountain because locals feared that Pontius Pilate's angry ghost would cause trouble. According to the legend, his body was brought here by the devil. Queen Victoria made the trip in 1868 and did much to dispel this long-held myth. You can follow in the queen's footsteps. See “Lucerne” in chapter 12.
- **Discovering the Lakes of Central Switzerland:** Experience the country's sparkling lakes with a tour through central Switzerland on the William Tell Express. Begin in Lucerne on a

historic paddle-wheel steamer that chugs across the lake while you have lunch. Before the tour is over, you'll have boarded a train on the lake's most distant shore, traversed one of the most forbidding mountain ranges in central Europe (through the relative safety of the St. Gotthard Tunnel), and descended into the lush lowlands of the Italian-speaking Ticino district. See chapter 12.

- **Wandering the Waterfront Promenades:** One of the greatest summer pleasures of Switzerland is wandering the palm-lined promenades in the Ticino, the Italian-speaking southern section of the country. The best resorts—and the best promenades—are found at Ascona, Locarno, and Lugano. You'll have both lake scenery and the rugged Italian Alps as a backdrop on your stroll. Of course, you can do more than just walk. There are swimming, boating, café sitting, people-watching, and even shopping. At night, when the harbor lights shine, you can join the Ticinese in their evening stroll. See chapter 15.

## 2 The Best Scenic Drives

- **The Road over the Great St. Bernard Pass:** Of the many mountain passes of alpine Europe, this is the most famous. Since the days of the Roman Empire, much of the commerce between northern Italy and the rest of Europe has navigated this low point in one of the most forbidding mountain ridges in the world. Modern-day pilgrims follow in the steps of Napoleon and his armies, who traversed the perilous pass in 1800 to invade Italy. Since 1964, a tunnel beneath the mountains has allowed traffic to move unhindered for at least half of every year. The Swiss section of the pass

road begins in French-speaking Martigny and ends in Italian-speaking San Bernardino, 56km (35 miles) away, but most motorists use the pass road as a slow but scenic midsummer diversion with long drives that begin near Basel or Zurich and end in the Italian cities of Aosta or Milan. See “Verbier” in chapter 9.

- **The Road over the Furka Pass:** Traveling in a southwest-to-northeast line for only 32km (20 miles), from the hamlet of Gletsch, northeast of Brig, to the mountain resort of Andermatt, the road follows the high-altitude frontier between German-speaking and Italian-speaking

Switzerland. En route you'll see the frozen mass of the glacier that feeds the Rhône and scenery that's absolutely magnificent. Any number of scenic highlights radiate out from here. See "Andermatt" in chapter 12.

- **St. Gotthard Pass Road:** One of the most vital roads in Europe stretches for 64km (40 miles) between German-speaking Andermatt and the Italian-speaking village of Biasca. It shares many characteristics of the above-mentioned St. Bernard Pass, which lies about 40 almost-impassable kilometers (25 miles) to the east. Some historians have suggested that the tolls collected since the 1300s along this road helped finance the continued independence of Switzerland itself. Since 1980, a 16km (10-mile) tunnel has allowed motorists to travel the route year-round. Traffic on the high road, however, remains clogged with summer vacationers who come for the stunning views. The landscape is mournful and bleak throughout much of this adventure, a testimony to the savage climactic conditions that exist at these high altitudes. See "Andermatt" in chapter 12.
- **The Road over the Bernina Pass:** During the Middle Ages, merchants led horse- and donkey-drawn caravans over this pass, risking their lives to carry supplies between what are now the German-speaking and Italian-speaking regions of Switzerland. Frostbite was commonplace, and many died in the snows en route.

Today cars can navigate the pass as part of a 2-hour, 55km (34-mile) drive between St. Moritz and Tirano. Be warned, this drive is never problem-free. The road is winding, and ice patches have a way of surfacing even in summertime. Snow usually closes the pass completely between mid-October and late April, although trains can usually get through except during the worst midwinter blizzards. But the views are truly spectacular. See "Pontresina" in chapter 14.

- **The Simplon Pass Road:** Unlike the St. Gotthard Pass Road, which is interspersed with artfully engineered bridges, hairpin turns, and retaining walls, the Simplon Pass Road gracefully conforms to the natural topography of some of the most scenic mountainsides in Europe. It stretches about 64km (40 miles), from German-speaking Brig over the Italian border to Domodossola. Napoleon demanded a low-altitude pass for his artillery, and the present road follows the 1805 plan designs. Napoleon's grip on power, ironically, crumbled before his armies could ever use the pass. Despite the best efforts of the Swiss Department of Highways, the road is often closed between December and early May, with automobiles diverted onto flatbed trains instead. These are rather awkwardly carried through one of the longest railway tunnels in the world, the Simplon Tunnel. See chapter 15.

### 3 The Best Train Trips

- **The Glacier Express:** It's advertised as the slowest express train in the world, requiring more than 7½ hours to pass through southeastern Switzerland. Despite that, its 274km (170 miles) of track are an awesome triumph of engineering (of which Switzerland is

justifiably proud). Beginning every day in Zermatt, in southwest Switzerland, and ending in St. Moritz, in Switzerland's east, it crosses more than 291 bridges and goes through 91 tunnels, traversing some of the country's most inaccessible mountains with an

ease that medieval pilgrims would have considered an act of God. You can also take the train from St. Moritz to Zermatt. Naturally, the scenery is breathtaking. The windows are large enough to allow clear views, and a dining car serves lunch with civilized efficiency. Advance reservations are required; for more information, call **Rail Europe** (☎ 877/272-RAIL). See chapters 9 and 14.

- **The Palm Express:** This 2-day itinerary of bus and rail routes takes travelers from St. Moritz (in the rugged Engadine district, near Switzerland's eastern frontier) to either Brig or (for a supplemental fee) Zermatt, in Switzerland's southwest. More leisurely than either of the two rail routes described here, it includes a hotel night en route. The scenery is spectacular. For more information, call **Rail Europe** (☎ 877/272-RAIL). See chapter 14.

- **The Bernina Express:** Like the Glacier Express, this railway excursion offers sweeping views of otherwise inaccessible alpine landscapes. A 4-hour trip (each way), it begins in the German-speaking capital of Zurich, traverses isolated regions where the native tongue is the ancient Romansh language, and ends in Italian-speaking Lugano. The rugged, high-altitude landscapes near Chur give way to the verdant, palm-lined lake districts near Tirano. It's the only train route in Switzerland that crosses the Alps without the benefit of tunnels en route. (It also travels some of the steepest railway lines in the world, negotiated without the benefit of racks and pinions.) Consider extending this trip with bus connections from Tirano—the end of the rail line—to the resort town of Lugano. For more information, call **Rail Europe** (☎ 877/272-RAIL). See chapter 15.

## 4 The Best Walks

- **Mount Säntis:** At 2,502m (8,207 ft.), Säntis is the northern outpost of the Alps and the most towering peak in the Alpstein massif. The quaint village of Appenzell is a good place to base yourself. The walk itself begins in the village of Wasserrauen, which is linked to Appenzell by hourly trains. After 8.9km (5½ miles)—4½ to 5½ hours, depending on your stamina—it ends at the village of Schwägalp, from which you can take a cable car to the viewing platform overlooking the summit of Säntis. Schwägalp is the terminus of the roads coming in from Urnäsch and Neu-St-Johann. See “Appenzell” in chapter 5.
- **Grosse Scheidegg:** This popular walk (“The great watershed” in English) takes you through some of the most dramatic scenery in the

Jungfrau region of central Switzerland, known for stunning white glaciers and soaring summits. One of the highlights of the walk is the awesome beauty of the Wetterhorn's massive gray rock walls. Setting out from the village of Meiringen, the walk ends 21km (13 miles) away (6½–9 hr.) in the resort of Grindelwald. If you get tired, take advantage of the bus stops along the way. See “Grindelwald” in chapter 8 for more details.

- **The Upper Engadine Lakes:** The four highland lakes of the Upper Engadine are 1,771m (5,809 ft.) above sea level, but as you walk along, it's like traversing the floor of a valley. Craggy ranges and scenic lake vistas greet you at every turn as you make your way along the 14km (8½-mile), 3- to 3½-hour walk from Maloja to

the resort of Silvaplana. You'll pass through the enchanting village of Segl-Maria, one of the most charming of the Romanesque-style villages

in eastern Switzerland, eventually arriving at the western edge of Lej da Silvaplana, a lake of unsurpassed beauty. See chapter 14.

## 5 The Best Bike Trips

- **Around the Katzenssee:** If you're in Zurich on a hot summer day and you're longing for the perfect place to swim, try cycling from Seebach station through the shaded woods to Katzenruti (picnic spot) and then on to the Katzenssee, a lake with a beach and Waldhaus restaurant. Return via Affoltern. Duration: 1½ hours, 13km (8 miles). See "Attractions" in chapter 4.
- **Around the Lake of Murten:** Start out at the small medieval town of Murten (stroll down the main street and visit the castle). Carry on to Faoug, Salavaux, Bellerive (a perfect lookout point), and Vully. Duration: 4 hours, 40km (25 miles). See "Murten" in chapter 6.
- **In the Rhône Valley, Lower Valais:** Cyclists on this route through the Valais set off from Martigny station then cross the Rhône River to the villages of Fully, Chataigner, Mazembroz, and Saillon. The cable-car ride to Iserables from the terminus of Riddes is well worth the trip. Duration: 1½ hours, 20km (12 miles). See chapter 9.
- **Through the Lake Geneva Vineyards:** Before leaving from the station at Morges, take a look at the castle (military museum). The route then leads up to Lully and, via Bussy

and Ballens, to Biere. Continuing down a small valley to Begnins and Fechy (a scenic lookout point), you'll find yourself in Aubonne. Finally, take the second-class road, via Lavigny, Villars-sous-Yens, and Lully, back to Morges. Duration: 5½ hours, 56km (35 miles). See "Attractions" in chapter 11.

- **Along the Shore of Lake Lucerne:** This trip can last a whole day, as there are so many spots worth stopping at along the way. Set off from Lucerne station and head for St. Niklausen and Kastanienbaum in the direction of Tribschen (location of the Richard Wagner Museum). The most beautiful stretch is along the lake to Winkel-Horw Beach. Return to Lucerne. Duration: 1½ hours, 13km (8 miles). See "Lucerne" in chapter 12.
- **Lugano's Hinterland:** To discover the small villages around Lugano, set off from the station for the nature reserve at Origgio Lake, and then proceed to Ponte Capriasca (a parish church with a well-preserved copy of da Vinci's *The Last Supper*). Continue to Tesserete and Colla, along the left valley side of Cassarate, through the woods to Sonvico, and then on to Dino, Ponte di Valle, and Lugano. Duration: 4 hours, 37km (23 miles). See "Lugano" in chapter 15.

## 6 The Best Small Towns & Villages

- **Appenzell:** Nowhere is folkloric Switzerland as well preserved as at the base of the green foothills of the Alps, where this old-fashioned country town still has cowmen in yellow

breeches and scarlet waistcoats walking its streets. People in other parts of Switzerland tend to call the locals "hillbillies," and for many Americans attracted to the quirky and the

quaint, it evokes the Ozarks. As you wander its centuries-old streets, sampling pear bread and honey cakes while in pursuit of local embroidery, you'll know why Appenzell is called the most authentic of Swiss villages. See "Appenzell" in chapter 5.

- **Wengen:** On a sheltered terrace high above the Lauterbrunnen Valley, this ski resort is one of the gems of the Bernese Oberland. No cars are allowed in this idyllic village, and from its streets (cleared of snow even in winter) and hotel windows, magnificent panoramic views greet you at every turn. The sunsets—over crags and waterfalls—are the most memorable we've ever seen in Switzerland. The village is best known for hosting the Ski World Cup, with the longest and most dangerous downhill race staged every January. See "Wengen" in chapter 8.
- **Sion:** Although it's the small capital of the Valais, this old Roman town with a French-speaking population is often neglected by those rushing to sample the pleasures of Zermatt and Verbier. But sleepy Sion has its own rewards. The town is dominated by the castles of Valère and Tourbillon, and, in its greater days, Sion's bishops were big players on the medieval

stage. The moody, melancholy look of the town has inspired such luminaries as Rilke, Goethe, and Rousseau. See "Sion" in chapter 9.

- **Andermatt:** At the crossroads of the Alps, in the Urseren Valley, this picture-postcard town lies at the junction of two alpine roads—the St. Gotthard highway and the road to Oberalp and Furka. From the top of Gemstock, reached by cable car, you can see 600 alpine peaks. Hikers, cross-country skiers, and mountain bikers are attracted to this little backwater. The life of the town is centered on the main street, some sections of which are still paved with granite stones. See "Andermatt" in chapter 12.
- **Morcote:** At the southernmost tip of the Ceresio peninsula, 11km (7 miles) south of Lugano, stands Switzerland's most idyllic village. Built in the Lombard style familiar to those who have toured Milan, Morcote's arcaded houses, often clay-colored, open directly on the water, with everything set against a backdrop of vineyards and cypresses. For the best view of this cliché of Ticino charm, climb the 400 steps to the Chiesa di Madonna del Sasso, which dates from the 13th century. See "Morcote" in chapter 15.

## 7 The Best Romantic Getaways

- **Mürren:** It's so isolated that you can only get here by cog railway or cable car. Set on a rocky, high-altitude ledge hundreds of feet above the Lauterbrunnen Valley, Mürren has a handful of chalet-style hotels, excellent ski and hiking trails, and sweeping views over the mountains of the Bernese Oberland. It's as picture-perfect a Swiss village as you'll find. See "Mürren" in chapter 8.
- **Gstaad:** Lying at the junction of four alpine valleys midway between the

Bernese Oberland and the Vaud Alps, Gstaad is a winter capital of the European glitterati. You can't get any more stylish, and the skiing is good too. Regardless of their price range, all the hotels seem to have cozy bedrooms, blazing fireplaces, and enough schnapps to set the mood. See "Gstaad" in chapter 8.

- **Verbier:** It lies at the bottom of an enormous alpine bowl ringed with spectacular ski slopes. Although many British travelers appreciate Verbier's

charms, the language and atmosphere of the resort are unpretentious and very, very French. You can have a lot of fun in Verbier, and if you didn't happen to import your own romance, you're likely to find some here. See "Verbier" in chapter 9.

- **Arosa:** One of the highest (1,800m/5,904 ft.) ski resorts in Switzerland, Arosa is less expensive and less

forbiddingly elegant than its nearest competitor, St. Moritz. Although the skiing here is excellent, you may consider a romantic getaway in midsummer, when a network of hiking trails leads to lush forests and small lakes. When you tire of these, cable cars can carry you and your companion to alpine heights and sublime vistas. See "Arosa" in chapter 13.

## 8 The Best Skiing

The jagged borders of Switzerland contain dozens of worthwhile ski resorts; the most popular are described in detail in the chapters that follow. But before heading off to the mountains for a bit of downhill racing, ask yourself some important questions: Do you prefer to schuss down a Swiss mountainside in relative isolation or accompanied by many other skiers? How chic and how expensive do you want your vacation to be? Do you pursue sports other than skiing (perhaps hang-gliding, curling, ice-skating, or tobogganing)? And after a day in the great outdoors, do you prefer to retire early to a simple mountain hut with a view of the stars, or do you yearn for late nights with the glittering demimonde of Europe?

- **Grindelwald:** This is one of the few resorts in the Bernese Oberland that occasionally mistakes itself for a genuine city rather than an artificial tourist creation. It offers a healthy dose of restaurants, bars, discos, and, unfortunately, traffic. There are a lot of affordable accommodations here—it's not nearly as snobby as some of the other resorts. Many skiers use it as a base camp for long-haul excursions to the slopes of First, Männlichen and Kleine Scheidegg. From Grindelwald, the resorts of Wengen and Mürren are accessible by cog railway and/or cable car (no traffic!). See "Grindelwald" in chapter 8.

- **Gstaad/Saanenland:** Gstaad is the most elegant pearl in the larger ski region of Saanenland, on the western edge of the Bernese Oberland. Although you can find a few inexpensive lodgings if you're lucky, don't count on it. The jet set comes here to see and be seen, and there's a lot to do off the slopes, such as music festivals, shopping, and people-watching. The architecture is stubbornly alpine, and the interior decorations range from baronial and woodsy in the most expensive hotels to kitschy in the cheaper ones. Opportunities for skiing are widespread, but the slopes are hardly the most difficult in Switzerland. Skiing is best for beginners and intermediates. See "Gstaad" in chapter 8.
- **Mürren:** One of the most oddly positioned resorts in Switzerland, Mürren sits on a rock ledge high above the Lauterbrunnen Valley of the Bernese Oberland. Accessible only by cable car, it's among the most picture-perfect resorts, full of chalet-style architecture and completely free of traffic. Though its isolation makes it charming, it also makes the cost of staying here somewhat higher. Mürren is closer than any other resort to the demanding slopes of the Schilthorn, where experienced skiers are offered nearly 32km (20 miles) of some of

the finest powder in Europe—and eagle-eyed panoramas over some of the most dramatically beautiful landscapes. See “Mürren” in chapter 8.

- **Verbier:** This is the premier ski resort of French-speaking Switzerland, with an unpretentious panache and a fun-filled atmosphere. Its restaurants serve some of the finest creative cuisine in the region; others make do with simple alpine fare for hearty appetites. If you don't speak French, you won't feel uncomfortable—many of the resort's nightlife options cater to Brits. (Throughout the town, English-style pubs compete cheerfully with French cafes.) Verbier lies at the heart of a sprawling, high-tech network of cable cars and gondolas that will connect you to such relatively unknown satellite resorts as Veysonnaz and La Tzoumaz. The resort is favored by world-class athletes for the difficulty of many of its slopes. See “Verbier” in chapter 9.
- **Zermatt:** It's the most southwesterly of the great Swiss ski resorts, occupying a high-altitude plateau at the foot of Switzerland's highest and most-photographed mountain, the Matterhorn. Much of the resort's charm derives from its strict building codes—you'll rarely see a modern-looking building here—and its almost complete lack of traffic. Access from the valley below is via cog railway only. Known for over a century as the party town of the Alps, Zermatt has always been a place where the beer-drinking and hedonistic—sometimes raunchy—revelry last into the early-morning hours. The skiing, incidentally, is superb. A complicated network of chairlifts, cog railways, and gondolas carries skiers to such peaks as Stockhorn, Rothorn, Riffelberg, Trockner Steg, and Testa Grigia. See “Zermatt & the Matterhorn” in chapter 9.
- **Arosa:** One of the most isolated of eastern Switzerland's resorts, Arosa is a relative newcomer to the country's ski scene. Drawing a young crowd, it's filled with contemporary buildings rather than traditional, chalet-inspired architecture. Ample annual snowfall, vast alpine meadows, and only one steeply inclined road into town make Arosa ideal for escapists and nature lovers. Families with children usually like the place too. Not as stratospherically expensive or pretentious as St. Moritz, Arosa offers lots of runs for intermediate skiers. Some of the resort's most dramatic slopes, which drop more than 1,000m (3,280 ft.) from beginning to end, are only for very experienced athletes. See “Arosa” in chapter 13.
- **Davos:** It's larger, with many more hotels, restaurants, après-ski bars, and discos than its neighbor, Klosters (see below), with which it shares access to a sweeping network of ski lifts and slopes. Davos attracts a sometimes-curiously mixture of the very wealthy and the more modest. It has slopes that appeal to advanced skiers, intermediates, and beginners. One of the most challenging runs descends from Weissflühgipfel at 2,844m (9,328 ft.) to Küblis at 810m (2,657 ft.). See “Davos” in chapter 13.
- **Klosters:** Named after a 13th-century cloister founded on the site, this resort is smaller, more intimate, and less urban than its nearest major competitor, Davos (see above). A favorite of the royal families of both Sweden and Britain, it offers at least two easily accessible ski zones, the snowfields of the Gotschna-Parsenn and the Madrisa. There's a wide range of trails and facilities, offering



## Impressions

*A Swiss artist living in the south of France said it: "Switzerland does not exist." This made some Swiss upset. Though Switzerland doesn't exist, every Swiss citizen has his assault rifle at home (with ammo). Of course they very rarely use their rifle to attack a bank or to hurt their wives. The Swiss used to be mercenaries, but today they don't want to get involved in other countries' feuds. Although they use migrant workers, they don't like foreigners (tourists are okay). Switzerland is this Disneyland of order and social harmony. It is a secure and peaceful place. It is not part of Europe. It might not even really be part of the world. This, I guess, should be good for the banking business.*

—Olivier Mosset, 1994

challenges to all skill levels. See "Klosters" in chapter 13.

- **St. Moritz:** The premier ski and social resort of eastern Switzerland, St. Moritz draws a lot of folks familiar with the art of conspicuous consumption; this is as close as you'll get to Hollywood in Switzerland. It's more distinctly Austrian than French in its flavor. Although only one or two authentic buildings remain from the town's medieval origins, vast amounts of money have been spent installing folkloric fixtures, carved paneling, and accents of local granite in the public and private areas of most hotels. Skiing in the region is divided into distinct areas, the most popular of which is Corviglia, on the mountains above

St. Moritz. Adventurers seeking diversion farther afield head for the slopes above the satellite resort of Sils Maria (Corvatsch) and the slopes above the nearby village of Pontresina (Diavolezza). There are plenty of difficult slopes in the region if you seek them out, but intermediate-level skiers enjoy taking a cable car from St. Moritz-Dorf to the top of Piz Corvatsch, almost 3,451m (11,319 ft.) above sea level. From here, with only one cable-car connection en route, you can ski a network of intermediate-level trails all the way back down to the resort's lake. St. Moritz boasts some of the most dependable annual snowfalls in Switzerland. See "St. Moritz" in chapter 14.

## 9 The Best Festivals

- **L'Escalade:** Way back on December 11, 1602, the city of Geneva was attacked by Savoyard soldiers trying to scale its ramparts. The duke of Savoy had lost his former possession and wanted it back. Alas, it was not to be. The denizens of Geneva valiantly held out, and one brave Amazon, Mère Royaume, scaled the ramparts and poured a pot of hot soup on the head of a Savoyard soldier. For 3 days and nights beginning December 11, normally staid Geneva

becomes virtually Rabelaisian, staging torchlight marches, country markets, and fife-and-drum parades, as a festive crowd in period costumes marches through the streets of the old city. Many present-day Mère Royaumes—armed with soup pots, of course—can be seen. See "When to Go" in chapter 2.

- **Vogel Gryff Volksfest:** This colorful tradition has a griffin, a lion, and a "wild man of the woods" floating down the Rhine followed by dancing

in the streets. It occurs alternately on January 13, 20, or 27 (changes every year). On a wintry day in January, a raft, laden with two drummers, two men with large flags, and two cannoneers who repeatedly fire gun salutes, floats down the Rhine. The principal figure is a savage masked man carrying an uprooted pine tree. At Mittlerebrücke (the middle bridge), he's met by a lion and a bird with an awesome beak. At noon the three figures dance on the bridge to the sound of drums. The Wilder Mann (savage man), the Leu (lion), and the Vogel Gryff (griffin) are old symbols for three Basel societies that could be called neighborhoods today. Throughout the afternoon and evening, street dancing in Basel honors the occasion, which originated in the 16th century. The purpose of all this madness? Ostensibly, to strengthen community ties. See "Basel" in chapter 6.

- **Celebrating the Onion:** If your favorite sandwich consists of only bread, mayonnaise, and onions, or your idea of humor is to poke fun at buffoons disguised as onions, you'll love the Swiss capital's celebration of Zibelemärit, held annually on the fourth Monday of November. During the festival, huge sections of the city's historic center are filled with vegetable stalls featuring plaited strings of onions (more than 100 tons may be sold in a day here) and other winter vegetables. The barrels of confetti thrown by competing camps of high-spirited students offer endless photo ops. Facetiously dressed jesters appear in bars and restaurants to poke fun (usually in Swiss-German) at the sometimes-pompous political posturing of their governmental elders. See the introduction to chapter 7 for more information.

## 10 The Best Museums

- **Museum Rietberg (Zurich):** Some of Europe's most interesting collections were amassed by gifted amateurs with enough money to pursue their hobbies. This museum honors the acquisitive skill of Baron von der Heydt, who donated his collection to the city of Zurich in 1952. It includes sculptures and artworks from the Americas and North and South Asia, archaic Buddhist art, carpets from Armenia, and masks from Africa and Oceania. See p. 103.
- **Landesmuseum (Swiss National Museum, Zurich):** This museum traces the growth and development of Swiss civilization from prehistory to the modern age. The collections include prehistoric artifacts, mementos from the Roman and Carolingian empires, and artworks from

Romanesque, Gothic, and Renaissance periods. There are also unusual collections of Swiss clocks, Swiss armor and weapons, and folkloric costumes and artifacts from each of the country's cantons. See p. 103.

- **The Paul Klee Collection (Bern):** Lying three miles east of Bern's Altstadt, more than 4,000 works of the great artist Paul Klee, born here in 1879, have been assembled under one roof. Today his magnificent art has been brought together as the finest example of "a Bern son who made good." See p. 188.
- **Kunstmuseum (Fine Arts Museum, Bern):** This museum showcases the great art that the capital of Switzerland acquired up until the end of the 1800s, beginning with a collection of medieval Italian primitives. The

museum also has a collection of the leading Swiss artists of today, but focuses on old masters from Cézanne to Matisse. See p. 188.

- **Musée d'Art et d'Histoire (Art and History Museum, Geneva):** Geneva's premier museum devotes equal space to exhibits on the history of civilization, the civic history of Geneva, archaeology, and world-class painting—everything from medieval to modern art. See p. 328.

- **Verkehrshaus der Schweiz (Swiss Transport Museum, Lucerne):** One of Switzerland's newer museums, founded in 1959, this collection pays homage to the railway, auto, and airplane industries that helped propel Europe into the modern age. It contains more than 60 historic locomotives, 40 automobiles, 50 motorcycles, and dozens of other conveyances. Other exhibitions are devoted to cable cars, steamships, and spaceships. There's even a planetarium. See p. 358.

## 11 The Best Luxury Hotels

- **Baur au Lac** (Zurich; ☎ 044/220-50-20; [www.bauraulac.ch](http://www.bauraulac.ch)): Prestigious and historic, it's one of the country's grandest hotels, welcoming prosperous guests since 1844. Richard Wagner, Franz Liszt, and John Lennon are some of the artists who have experienced its charms. Today the international business community considers it a favorite. See p. 79.
- **Widder Hotel** (Zurich; ☎ 044/224-25-26; [www.widderhotel.ch](http://www.widderhotel.ch)): In the heart of the city's Old Town, 10 historic buildings dating from the 15th century have been transformed into an intimate luxury inn. Massive wooden beams and 16th-century frescoes still exist from the days when these buildings were part of the butchers' guild, but now they're juxtaposed with glass elevators and stainless-steel furniture. It's an offbeat, fun choice in a staid city, made especially inviting because of the live jazz in the bar. See p. 82.
- **Hotel Drei Könige** (Basel; ☎ 061/260-50-50; [www.drei-koenige-basel.ch](http://www.drei-koenige-basel.ch)): Claiming to be the oldest hotel in Europe, the Hotel Drei Könige has operated continuously as an inn since 1026. It was the site of a meeting between two Holy Roman emperors

and a Burgundian king that eventually established the southwestern borders of present-day Switzerland. Voltaire, Queen Victoria, and Kaiser Wilhelm II were only a few of this hotel's famous guests. Today there's live jazz in the bar and a cosmopolitanism that permeates every part of this very comfortable hotel. See p. 151.

- **Allegro Bern** (Bern; ☎ 031/339-55-00; [www.allegro-hotel.ch](http://www.allegro-hotel.ch)): This is the hippest, most savvy, and most sophisticated hotel in the Swiss capital. Set just across the river from the town's historic core, the hotel offers great service, grand comfort, and a lot of style and charm. See p. 178.
- **Palace Hotel Gstaad** (Gstaad; ☎ 033/748-50-50; [www.palace.ch](http://www.palace.ch)): Every winter this becomes one of the most sought-after hotels in the world, attracting the chic and fabulous who create what's been called the most amusing and expensive annual house party in Europe. Built in 1912, the hotel sits on a promontory above Gstaad (not exactly a village unfamiliar with luxury). Everything is very, very luxurious. See p. 232.
- **Beau-Rivage Palace** (Lausanne; ☎ 021/613-33-33; [www.brp.ch](http://www.brp.ch)): This is the most prestigious hotel in Lausanne. Undeniably beautiful, it's a

Beaux Arts masterpiece richly associated with the city's cultural and social elite. Service is impeccable. Although it has long catered to wealthy and conservative French-speaking Swiss, it has made great efforts in recent years to attract a younger, more international clientele. See p. 274.

- **Le Richemond** (Geneva; ☎ 022/715-70-00; [www.lerichemond.com](http://www.lerichemond.com)): Built in 1875 in the style of a neoclassical palace, the newly restored Le Richemond drips with Gobelin tapestries, French antiques, and a sophisticated, hardworking staff for whom

absolutely nothing is a surprise. It also has the most fascinating bar in town; but if you decide to have a drink here, don't even think of showing up in torn jeans. See p. 309.

- **Kulm Hotel** (St. Moritz; ☎ 081/836-80-00; [www.kulmhotel-stmoritz.ch](http://www.kulmhotel-stmoritz.ch)): This is the great bastion of luxury of the Engadine, rivaling even Suvretta House and Badrutt's Palace Hotel for supremacy. The greats and near-greats of the world have found refuge from the snows here in this trio of buildings, the oldest of which dates from 1760. See p. 424.

## 12 The Most Charming Small Hotels

- **Hotel Romantik Florhof** (Zurich; ☎ 044/250-26-26; [www.florhof.ch](http://www.florhof.ch)): The most charming of the little boutique hotels of Zurich, this was originally the home of a wealthy 15th-century merchant before its transformation. At the edge of Old Town, the hotel represents superb value. See p. 85.
- **Hotel Appenzell** (Appenzell; ☎ 071/788-15-15; [www.hotel-appenzell.ch](http://www.hotel-appenzell.ch)): Set on the main square of the most folkloric town in Switzerland, this hotel is outfitted in a rustic country-Swiss theme with touches of marble and walnut in the bedrooms. Check out the elaborate antique paneling in one of the dining rooms, rescued from a much older building just before it was demolished. See p. 131.
- **Hotel-Restaurant Adler** (Stein-am-Rhein; ☎ 052/742-61-61; [www.adlersteinamrhein.ch](http://www.adlersteinamrhein.ch)): Although its bedrooms are comfortable and clean, the location, in one of the most colorful cities on the Rhine, is what gets our vote. We love the hotel's frescoed facade, which depicts characters and plots derived from medieval Rhenish legends. See p. 139.
- **Hotel Krafft** (Basel; ☎ 061/690-91-30; [www.hotelkrafft.ch](http://www.hotelkrafft.ch)): It's inexpensive and conveniently located a short walk from the historic core of the city. Its outdoor terrace overlooks the river, the town hall, and the cathedral. The bedrooms have the kind of worn but decent early-20th-century furnishings that remind us of these old-fashioned family-run pensions of postwar Europe. See p. 154.
- **Hostellerie des Chevaliers** (Gruyères; ☎ 026/921-19-33; [www.gruyeres-hotels.ch](http://www.gruyeres-hotels.ch)): This atmospheric inn stands conveniently aloof from the overrun tourist center but offers the same panoramic views as the châteaux at Gruyères. The decor is the warmest and most old-fashioned in town, rich with antiques, woodwork, and ceramic stoves. See p. 169.
- **Belle Epoque** (Bern; ☎ 031/311-43-36; [www.belle-epoque.ch](http://www.belle-epoque.ch)): The most sophisticated small-scale hotel in the Swiss capital was created out of two historic town houses from the Middle Ages. The hotel celebrates Jugendstil or a Teutonic Art Nouveau. The place is a jewel. See p. 178.

- **Hotel Olden** (Gstaad; ☎ 033/748-49-50; [www.hotelolden.ch](http://www.hotelolden.ch)): Set on the town's main thoroughfare, the Olden is a great deal compared to other Gstaad hotels. It enjoys a solid reputation, especially among the many skiers and mountain guides who patronize the restaurant and café on the hotel's ground floor. The rooms are cozy and a bit cramped, but comfortable—perfect if you're planning to spend your time out and about. See p. 233.
- **Hotel Antika** (Zermatt; ☎ 027/967-21-51; [www.antika.ch](http://www.antika.ch)): It's one of the few hotels in Zermatt that won't gobble up most of your travel budget. You wouldn't really guess that it's an affordable option at first glance: Each room has its own covered loggia, and the lobby is carefully paneled with weathered planks. This is a good choice for exploring the most famous resort town of Switzerland's Valais district. See p. 259.
- **The Hotel** (Lucerne; ☎ 041/226-86-86; [www.the-hotel.ch](http://www.the-hotel.ch)): This is central Switzerland's most charming boutique hotel. Designed by Jean Nouvel, France's most famous architect, it is exclusive and elegant, luxury personified yet artfully simple at the same time. See p. 361.
- **Hotel Drei Könige und Post** (Andermatt; ☎ 041/887-00-01; [www.3koenige.ch](http://www.3koenige.ch)): Located directly north of the St. Gotthard Pass at 2,109m (6,918 ft.), this hotel was built on the site of an inn that has been showing wayfarers hospitality since 1234. Even Goethe spent a night at this family-run place in 1775. Some of the rooms open onto balconies, and the hotel's regional Swiss cuisine attracts both locals and visitors. See p. 384.
- **Hotel Drei Könige** (Chur; ☎ 081/354-90-90; [www.dreikoenige.ch](http://www.dreikoenige.ch)): Its foundations were laid in the 1300s, and the same hardworking family has owned and managed the place since 1911. It provides a note of cheer in an industrialized, high-altitude town where the temperatures can sometimes plummet. Of special note is its restaurant, one of the most consistently popular in town. See p. 389.

### 13 The Best Restaurants

- **Kronenhalle** (Zurich; ☎ 044/262-99-00): It has a hearty, rustic alpine theme, but a glance at its menu, its clientele, and its artwork will quickly convince you that this is a supremely distinctive restaurant. Enjoy paintings by such luminaries as Kandinsky, Matisse, Klee, and Braque as you dine. See p. 93.
- **Peter Mann's Kunststuben** (Küsnacht; ☎ 044/910-07-15): Come here for the sublime cuisine of chef Horst Petermann. Since he opened this acclaimed restaurant south of Zurich, demanding diners have been heading here to partake of the constantly changing specialties. After you've sampled his herby Tuscan dove with pine nuts or his lobster with artichoke and almond oil, you'll know that this is as good as it gets in the Zurich area. See p. 96.
- **Restaurant Stucki Bruderholz** (Basel; ☎ 061/361-82-22; [www.stucki-bruderholz.ch](http://www.stucki-bruderholz.ch)): There are a garden, a collection of upscale antique furniture, a clientele speaking every conceivable European language, and some of the best cuisine in northwestern Switzerland, all based on modern interpretations of French and German recipes. See p. 157.
- **Le Restaurant Pierroz** (Verbier; ☎ 027/771-63-23): You'd never

know that the simple chalet-style facade of this place shelters one of the most legendary restaurants in the Valais. One of the finest meals we've ever had in Switzerland was served here on a snowy night. It included a platter of sea bass with sea urchins, followed by couscous of crawfish and pigeon with truffles. Gourmets and epicures will cross any number of national borders to sample the creative cuisine of Roland Pierroz. See p. 243.

- **Hotel de Ville** (Crissier; ☎ 021/634-05-05; [www.relaischateaux.com/hoteldeville](http://www.relaischateaux.com/hoteldeville)): Philippe Rochat is the chef of the moment in Switzerland, having taken over from Alfred (Frédé) Girardet, who some hailed as the world's greatest chef. That left some chef's toque for Rochat to try and fill, but he successfully retained the international acclaim that Girardet enjoyed. Occupying a building originally designed as the town hall of a village outside Lausanne, the master continues to please the hundreds of devoted gastronomes who often travel great distances at great expense to dine here. See p. 280.
- **Le Pont de Brent** (Brent; ☎ 021/964-52-30): No one had even heard of Brent until this restaurant opened in a late-19th-century house in the heart of the village. Today, the restaurant has put the village on the map, in part because of the excellence of such dishes as mussel-and-leek soup and roast rabbit with mustard sauce. See p. 294.
- **Le Chat-Botté** (Geneva; ☎ 022/716-69-20): Richly sheathed with tapestries and accented with the kind of art and accessories that would have made Louis XVI feel right at home, this restaurant attracts some of the wealthiest and most jaded clients in the world. Everything works smoothly, with nary a glitch, but you

can only imagine how hard the staff labors to maintain its position as one of the best restaurants in Switzerland. See p. 313.

- **Jöhri's Talvo** (St. Moritz; ☎ 081/833-44-55): It's hailed by many food critics as the best restaurant in the Engadine. Located in Europe's ritziest resort, in the satellite village of Champfer, it attracts some of the most discerning palates in the world to its refined take on a French and regional cuisine. See p. 427.
- **La Favola** (Geneva; ☎ 022/311-74-37): This is the best Italian restaurant in Geneva, and possibly the city's best restaurant of any kind. The chefs' tender pillows of tortellini would be hard to find this side of Bologna. The cuisine has authentic flavor, the service is skilled and smooth, and only the freshest ingredients go into the kitchen's skillet and stewpots. See p. 319.
- **Chesa Grischuna** (Klosters; ☎ 081/422-22-22; [www.chesagrischuna.ch](http://www.chesagrischuna.ch)): Every evening this restaurant succeeds at creating a genuine sense of unpretentious, old-fashioned warmth. Over the years it has hosted such showbiz and political types of yesterday as Winston Churchill, the Aga Khan, Truman Capote, and Audrey Hepburn. The food is hearty and nourishing—perfect for the cold-weather climate of Klosters. See p. 400.
- **Chadafo Grill, in the Chesa Veglia** (Dorf; ☎ 081/837-28-00): Built in 1658, this business is located in what's said to be the only authentic Engadine-style house that remains in all of St. Moritz. It contains three different dining rooms, one of which is an informal pizzeria. The other two are rustically elegant hideaways, redolent with warmth and comfort, which cater to an international and very prosperous clientele. See p. 426.