

Switzerland's Mountain Resorts

By **TERRI & MARTIN HIRSCH**

Continuing our train travel by Eurail Pass, we left Berlin for a seven-hour trip to Basel, Switzerland—situated on the border of France, Germany, and Switzerland. Basel is famous for being one of the most picturesque and best preserved old towns in Europe.

The Radisson Blu Hotel was just a few minutes walk from the SBB train station. With 205 modern rooms and suites, the hotel was fully equipped with amenities, including high-speed and free wireless Internet. The Radisson also offered rooms for nonsmokers and the disabled.

While taking an evening stroll through the narrow winding streets of the old town, we discovered the market square, the old Romanesque-Gothic cathedral, antique book shops, elegant boutiques, and numerous restaurants offering an excellent choice of international and regional cuisine.

Chur is the junction of world-renowned railway lines such as the Bernina Express from Chur to Tirano and the Glacier Express from Zermatt to Chur, Davos, and St. Moritz.

The following morning, we were heading to the Alpine city of Chur located in the center of Switzerland. Chur is the junction of world-renowned railway lines such as the Bernina Express from Chur to Tirano and the Glacier Express from Zermatt to Chur, Davos, and St. Moritz.

Chur, the capital of Graubünden, is the oldest town in Switzerland. This village, dating back to the 15th century with its narrow winding streets and mountains, is an ideal spot for walking and visiting vineyards. Some of the highlights of Chur's culture and history include the Catholic Cathedral, the Bishop's Palace, the Protestant Church of St. Martin, and three museums depicting local history, nature, and international art.

Chur's regional mountain has its own winter and summer sports. In the winter, the aerial cableway links the city with ski slopes and spas high up in the mountains. In the summer, the aerial cableway transports you from the old town directly up to the Alpine meadows. It is the ideal spot for walking and visiting the vineyards. Going by foot or by mountain bike, you will find

yourself in a different world of nature and wide open spaces.

EXPLORING OLD TOWN

The Freieck Hotel is located right in the heart of the old town where traffic is prohibited at night. It is a historic building dating back to 1575. Over the years it has undergone extensive renovation, including the latest in 2008. The hotel offered us modern comforts, an elevator, bar, café, and meeting rooms. We had dinner in the old town in the family-owned Italian restaurant Ticino, which had excellent food with exceptional service.

Our day started with a marvelous breakfast by Martyn Stockmann, hotel owner, cooking eggs and sausages accompanied by fresh breads, cereal, cheeses, yogurt, and fruit. An hour after breakfast, we boarded our first-class panorama seats on the legendary Rhaetian Railway's Bernina Express.

We traveled along a route regarded as the most beautiful of all Alpine crossings, passing through 55 tunnels and over 196 bridges and viaducts. The Rhaetian Railway's surrounding landscapes of rugged ravines and gigantic glaciers have been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. At our seats, the coffee wagon sold freshly brewed cold and hot drinks, fresh croissants, sandwiches, and snack bars.

THE SCENIC BERNINA EXPRESS

The Bernina Express continues to the mountain pass from the Thusis station where the World Heritage Site begins. It approaches the Landwasser Viaduct, which is considered a masterpiece in the art of railway track construction. The train curves high above the valley and reaches an entrance of towering rock walls where it climbs up and through numerous tunnels before emerging. We had reached the Engadine region, a valley in eastern Switzerland near the Australian and Italian borders.

The train branches off and arrives in Davos, a winter and summer resort village considered to be the metropolis of the Alps. Originally a health resort in 1860, today it is the largest vacation resort in the Alps.

The railway continues to wind its way through rugged ravines and steep passes before coming into the St. Moritz station, situated on the south part of the Alps in the Upper Engadine. It is one of the most famous destinations in the world and is known for its great skiing.

Leaving St. Moritz, the train heads to the Pontresina railway station built in 1907. From the Pontresina station, the Bernina Express continues toward the plateau of the Morteratsch Glacier.

At sightseeing speed, the train passes this massive glacier and continues to the Alp Grum Station and Restaurant Building, which was built in 1923.



THE BERNINA EXPRESS: The White Lake and surrounding mountains are just a sample of the beauty to be enjoyed while riding on the Bernina Express. **TERRI HIRSCH**

We spotted some hikers eating while other hikers were gazing toward the panoramic views of the summit. From the train, we were able to see part of the snow-covered upper slopes and summit of the Palu Glacier.

The Bernina Express continues to follow the mountainous terrain, climbing up toward the Bernina Pass where we could see the beautiful White Lake named after the melting of the white glaciers into the lake.

Through a wooded landscape of mountain trees with scaly, reddish-gray bark, the scenery changes as the railway curves and moves to the other side of a valley verdant with grass and plants. There, nestled beneath the Alps, is the valley of Poschiavo. The train travels straight down the main street into this picturesque village and then stops. Traffic comes to a standstill. We got off the train for a short visit in Poschiavo as the Bernina Express continued to Tirano, Italy.

PERFECT POSCHIAVO AND PONTRESINA

After walking over a small bridge, we came to the center of Poschiavo and stopped to enjoy an espresso on a sunny piazza. Two hours later, we re-boarded the train for an overnight stay in Pontresina. The Bernina Express was now passing amazing landscapes and heading back up the mountain, going through the Bernina Pass and snow-capped mountains before reaching the Alpine resort of Pontresina.

Located in the center of the city is the Hotel Mueller, which was originally a post office before it became a hotel. The Hotel Mueller was first opened in 1890 by Jacob Mueller and has been in business for over a century. Jacob Mueller was a



HISTORIC HOTEL: The Hotel Freieck in Chur, Switzerland, is located right in the heart of the old town. It is a historic building dating back to 1575, which offers modern comforts, an elevator, bar, café, and meeting rooms. **TERRI HIRSCH**

wine merchant, postmaster, and hotel-keeper in Pontresina.

The Mueller family managed this hotel over 40 years ago. In spring 2005, the new owner renovated the hotel. It is now a modern Alpine-style mountain lodge with two-bedroom suites consisting of 19 rooms with TV, telephone, and a modern Italian restaurant.

The name Pontresina first appeared in documents dating back to the 12th century. It is a typical Engadine village surrounded by mountain peaks and glaciers. This village offers magnificent views of the highest peaks in the eastern Alps. The 12th century mountain church of Santa Maria has frescoes dating back to the 13th century.

There are many well-preserved and restored 17th and 18th century houses. One of the highlights was our visit to the Alpine Museum, a farmhouse complex from the 17th century that was refurbished in 1967. Through the large arched entrance door is a corridor with old village photographs, a living room, kitchen, pantry, and library. Upstairs are two bed-



AT THE AIRPORT: The Airside Center at the Zurich Airport. There are many things to do even at the airport, which has an array of over 70 shops, restaurants, bars, cafés, and a grocery store. **COURTESY OF ZURICH AIRPORT**

rooms with connecting staircases to the living room below.

There are also rooms with impressive pictures of mountain experiences, a collection of rocks and minerals, ski collections, mountain climbing equipment, and a hunting and wildlife room. Visitors can see a bird collection consisting of 133 species, collected between the years 1855 and 1880. Each stuffed bird we were allowed to touch sounded a different bird call.

ENJOY THE ZURICH AIRPORT

The next day we left Pontresina on the SBB Railway for an overnight at the Radisson Blu Hotel, located in the Zurich Airport. Getting off at the Zurich Flughafen station was quite a surprise. There were signs everywhere for the trains, the airport planes, and the Radisson Blu Hotel as well as the airport shopping which featured over 70 shops, restaurants, bars, cafés and a grocery store.

We entered the Radisson Blu Hotel through a large lobby that had a stunning 6-story high atrium containing a Wine Tower. The Tower holds 4,000 bottles of wines and champagnes and features two acrobatic girls called "Wine Angels." When a customer orders a bottle of wine from the restaurant or bar, the bottle number is given to the Wine Angel. Accompanied by a colorful spectacle of light, an angel

equipped with special holding gear is pulled up to the tower's top by a computer-controlled system and lowered to the appropriate bottle. The Wine Angel puts the wine in a pouch and is lowered to the bottom of the Wine Tower to deliver the bottle to restaurant service staff.

The Zurich Airport is one of the main international hubs for central Europe with over 150 connections to various destinations around the world. Zurich's old town and its cultural and historical attractions are just 10 minutes by train. Located directly on the airport premises is Zurich's first on-site airport hotel. The Radisson Blu Hotel, Zurich Airport is situated at Terminal 1, just a few steps from the arrival and departure area. Opened August 1, 2008, this 10-story Airport Hotel complex offers direct access to arrival and departure terminals, 330 rooms, and suites in four different designs. The hotel complex contains 51 multi-functional conference rooms, located on levels 7 and 8. Its modern interior design and state-of-the-art facilities make the Radisson Blu Hotel, Zurich Airport one of the most attractive event locations in the Greater Zurich area.

For more information: www.myswitzerland.com

Terri and Martin Hirsch are freelance writers who love travel.

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Quiz #233



OFFSHORE OWNERSHIP: What country owns each of the following islands off the coast of South America?

- Easter Island in the Pacific
- Falkland Islands in the Atlantic
- Galapagos Islands in the Pacific

Read The Epoch Times next week for the answer!
Answer for Quiz #232:

ABOVE, BELOW, OR STRADDLING: In relation to the equator, the mainland parts of three continents are entirely north of it: NORTH AMERICA, EUROPE, ASIA; the mainland parts of two continents are divided by it: SOUTH AMERICA, AFRICA; and the mainland of one continent is entirely south of it: AUSTRALIA.

SUDOKU

Fill in the boxes using numbers between 1 and 9 so that each column, each row, and each 3x3 square contain all nine numbers only once.

3		8						4
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