Central Switzerland

In its own way as gorgeous as the Bernese Oberland, Switzerland’s geographical and political heartland has a more soothing beauty. The mountains hunching conspiratorially around Lake Lucerne at the core of the region are greener and less jagged, and a greater number of Alpine villages and larger towns make the place feel more lived-in and familiar.

The pact that kick-started the Swiss nation was signed here more than 700 years ago on the shores of Lake Uri, and Central Switzerland is the guardian of many Swiss founding tales and myths. Its far-east corner is William Tell country, where the legendary patriot is said to have shot an apple from his son’s head and gone on the run. The nearby Rüti meadow is the exact spot where Switzerland was signed into being in 1291; the village of Schwyz still proudly displays that original constitution.

Interesting stories attach themselves to many places, from the Christian miracle that made Einsiedeln a place of pilgrimage to the pagan superstitions surrounding several peaks. According to legend, the ghost of Pontius Pilate haunts Mt Pilatus, while mischievous elves inhabit the sides of Mt Rigi.

Taking a cable car up these panoramic mountains, and others like them such as Mt Titlis and the Stanserhorn, is one of the main pastimes here. Meanwhile, lake steamers bob from shore to shore, and there’s plenty of scenic hiking and skiing to be enjoyed.

Of course, as the largest town, Lucerne itself remains pivotal to the experience. Built on water, with medieval bridges, old squares and a striking skyline, it’s one of the country’s main drawcards. Sometimes, when tour guides in medieval costume appear, it’s even vaguely reminiscent of Venice. Fortunately, however, it never gets that choked or busy.

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- Admiring the Kapellbrücke (p214) in Lucerne and climbing the city wall (p216)
- Seeing two sides of Pablo, in the Picasso Museum (p216) and Sammlung Rosengart (p216)
- Taking a cruise around Lake Lucerne (p222)
- Enjoying a mountain day-trip to the peak of Mt Titlis (p230) or Mt Pilatus (p222)
- Waking up to an unforgettable sunrise on top of 1800m Mt Rigi (p223)

**POPULATION:** 695,058  **AREA:** 4484 SQ KM  **LANGUAGE:** GERMAN

**Orientation & Information**

The official tourist region of Central Switzerland (Zentralschweiz) has at its heart Lake Lucerne (the Vierwaldstättersee or Lake of the Four Forest Cantons), which is surrounded by the four cantons of Lucerne, Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden (itself subdivided into the half-cantons of Nidwalden and Obwalden). Also included in this region is Switzerland’s smallest rural canton of Zug, containing Lake Zug (Zugersee). In the north and west, Central Switzerland is fairly flat, but a southern tip reaches into the Alps as far as the St Gotthard Pass.

For information on the entire region, contact the tourist office in Lucerne (p214).

**Getting There & Around**

The nearest airport is Zürich, while road and rail connections are excellent in all directions. An interesting way to leave the region is on the William Tell Express (p331).

If you don’t have a Swiss or Eurail Pass (both include lake journeys), you might want to consider purchasing the regional Tell-Pass (www.tell-pass.ch; per 7/15 days Sfr140/188; Apr-Oct) for rail and boat travel. Sold by the Lucerne tourist office and at all boat stations, it provides travel for two/five days respectively, and half-price fares for the remainder.

The Vierwaldstättersee guest card, available whenever you’re staying anywhere in this
region, is worth having; you should ask for it if your accommodation doesn’t offer it. Benefits include various discounts on sporting facilities, 10% to 50% off certain cable cars, and reductions on museum admission in Lucerne and elsewhere.

**LUCERNE**

pop 57,817 / elevation 435m

Legend has it that an angel with a light showed Lucerne’s first settlers where to build a chapel, and in good weather even an atheist might describe the city’s location as heaven-sent. Lapped by a scenic lake, surrounded by mountains of myth – a picture of this once small fishing village and its wooden Kapellbrücke (Chapel Bridge) is enough to connote the very essence of Switzerland.

Between the 13th and 19th centuries, Lucerne (Luzern in German, or ‘the city of lights’) made its fortune as an essential stop on the trade route over the Alps. Then its charming medieval centre and its fabulous position began attracting tourists. It’s never looked back.

**Orientation**
The city is on the western edge of its namesake lake, straddling the Reuss River. The medieval town centre is on the northern bank, within walking distance of the Hauptbahnhof (train station) on the southern side.

**Information**

**BOOKSHOPS**
Schweizerhof Buchhandlung (041 410 23 71; Schweizerhofquai 2; 9am-6.30pm Mon, 8.30am-6.30pm Tue-W Fri, 9am-4pm Sat)

**DISCOUNT CARDS**
Luzern Guide Stamped by your hotel, this entitles you to discounts on museum entry, some sporting facilities, car rental and lake cruises.

**Museum Pass** (per adult/child Frs29/14.50) Free entry to all museums; valid for one month.

**INTERNET ACCESS**
Stadtbibliothek (Town library; Löwenplatz 11; per hr Frs4; 9am-6.30pm Mon, 10am-6.30pm Tue-Fri, 9am-9pm Thu, 10am-4pm Sat)

Internetcafé (041 410 77 27; Löwengraben 31; per 15min Frs4; 9am-9pm)

**LAUNDRY**
Jet Wash (041 240 01 51; Bruchstrasse 28; 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Thu, 8.30am-12.30pm Fri, 9am-2pm Sat)

**MEDICAL SERVICES**
Permanence Medical Center (041 211 14 44; Basement, Hauptbahnhof; 24hr)

**MONEY**
There are numerous ATMs all around the Hauptbahnhof.

**POST**
Main post office (041 229 95 23; cnr Bahnhofstrasse & Bahnhofplatz; 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat)

**TOURIST INFORMATION**

**Luzern Tourism** (enquiries 041 227 17 17, hotel reservations 041 227 17 27; www.luzern.ch; Zentralstrasse 5; 9am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7.30pm Sat & Sun mid-Jun–mid-Sep, to 6.30pm May & Oct, 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Sun Nov–Apr) Reached from either Zentralstrasse or from Platform 3 of the train station. Offers city walking tours.

**Sights**

**MEIDVEL BRIDGES**
The Kapellbrücke (Chapel Bridge), crossing the Reuss River in the Old Town, is Lucerne’s most potent symbol. It dates from the 14th century and the octagonal water tower remains original. However its sides and gabled roof are modern reconstructions, rebuilt after a disastrous fire in 1993. The bridge is famous for the triangular, painted roof panels that line its ceiling, created by Heinrich Wägmann in 1614 and depicting important events from Swiss history and mythology. Fortunately, some 30 of these were also rescued from the blaze and have been replaced at either end of the bridge. Gaps between them have been retained as a constant reminder of the loss of others.

The Spreuerbrücke (Spreuer Bridge) further down the river is darker and smaller, but its 1408 structure and 17th-century paintings are all original. The roof panels’ theme here is artist Caspar Meglinger’s movie-storyboard-style sequence of paintings, The Dance of Death.
MUSEUMS & CHATEAU GUTSCH
From its medieval Museumgärtli (city wall; admission free; 8am-7pm Apr-Oct), there are marvellous views over Lucerne’s rooftops to the lake and mountains beyond. A walkway is open between the Schirmerturm (tower), where you enter, and the Wachturm, from where you have to retrace your steps. You can also ascend and descend the Zyturm or Männlitturm (the latter not connected to the ramparts walkway).

At the time of writing, the hilltop Château Gutsch hotel was closed; its fate unknown. However, the Gütschbahn funicular (SFr3 each way) continues to run up to the summit, where there are also breathtaking views.

PICASSO MUSEUM
Don’t arrive at the Picasso Museum (041 410 35 33; forrenagen 27; student/young adult SFr8/6; combined with Sammlung Rosengart SFr18/16; 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 11am-5pm Nov-Mar) expecting to find many of the man’s works. Although it does include a few ceramics and sketches, this is principally a portrait of the artist as an impish craftsman, lover and father. Nearly 200 photographs by David Douglas Duncan create a captivating picture of the last 17 years of Picasso’s life with his family in their Cannes home. It’s a uniquely revealing series.

SAMMLUNG ROSENGART
By contrast, the Rosengart Collection (041 220 16 60; www.rosengart.ch; Pilatusstrasse 10; adult/student SFr15/9, combined with Picasso Museum SFr18/16; 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 11am-5pm Nov-Mar) expecting to find many of the man’s works. Although it does include a few ceramics and sketches, this is principally a portrait of the artist as an impish craftsman, lover and father. Nearly 200 photographs by David Douglas Duncan create a captivating picture of the last 17 years of Picasso’s life with his family in their Cannes home. It’s a uniquely revealing series.

KULTUR UND KONGRESSZENTRUM & KUNSTMUSEUM
A striking work of post-modern architecture in an otherwise largely historic city, Parisian architect Jean Nouvel’s KKL (Arts & Congress Centre; www.kkl-luzern.ch; Europlattplatz) really stands out with its prime waterfront location, neighbouring the main train station. But if you think it looks good, wait until you hear it. The acoustics of the main concert hall are as close to perfect as humankind has ever known – or at least that’s the verdict of many musicians and conductors who have performed here. The trick is that the tall, narrow concert hall is partly built below the level of the lakeside promenade, with a reverberation chamber and an adjustable suspended ceiling, all creating extra sound dampening. In the bubble of silence that has resulted, you can hear everything – to the point where audience members are even quite self-conscious about unwrapping sweets.

All the accolades showered upon the hall – it can be adapted to any type of music – have raised the profile of the tripartite Lucerne Music Festival (see opposite). So increasingly it’s one of the highlights on the global music calendar.

There are public tours (041 226 77 77; info@kkl-luzern.ch) of the building most Saturdays and Sundays at 11am, but they are only in German. Individual tours can, however, be arranged in English for groups.

OTHER MUSEUMS

Verkehrshaus
Planes, trains and automobiles are showcased in the huge, family-oriented Transport Museum (040 848 852 020; www.verkehrshaus.org; Lidosstrasse 5; adult/child/rail-pass holder/student SFr26/10/12; 9am-6pm Apr-Oct, 9am-5pm Nov-Mar). They are found alongside race rockets, flight simulators and other interesting exhibits designed to bring out your inner child (or inner bully if you’re one of the occasionally over-eager adults). Switzerland’s most popular museum also has a planetarium, a giant-screen IMAX cinema (www.imax.ch; adult/child SFr6/12 extra, not covered by the Museum Pass; screenings hourly 11am-9pm) and the Swiss Arena – an eye-catching floor map of Switzerland and accompanying geographical puzzle. There’s a collection of technology-related paintings, drawings and sculptures by Swiss artist Hans Erni. Finally, in good weather, you can permanently moon a hot-air balloon, the Hi-Flyer, will take you up 120m above the complex (call 041 370 20 20 after noon daily for details). Take bus No 6, 8 or 24 to get here.

VICTORIAN-ERA ATTRACTIONS
North of the old town, there’s a cluster of 19th-century attractions for which Lucerne is famous but whose appeal is largely nostalgic. The renowned Löwendenkmal (Lion Monument; Denkmalsstrasse 4) is dedicated to the Swiss soldiers who died in 1792 defending King Louis XVI and family during the French Revolution. Mark Twain once called this carved lion the ‘saddest and most moving piece of rock in the world’, but the sentiment might be lost on modern audiences.

Next door is the Gletschergarten (Glider Garden; 041 410 43 40; www.gletschergarten.ch; Denkmalsstrasse 4; adult/student/child SFr10/8/5; 9am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm rest of year). This strip of rock bears the scars (including huge potholes) inflicted on it by the glacier that slid over it some 20 million years ago. The best thing about the garden, though, is its kitschy 1001-night mirror maze. The Alpineum (041 410 40 64; www.alpineum.ch; Denkmalsstrasse 11; adult/student SFr5/4; 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Apr-Oct) opposite is a musty collection of Alpine relief maps and can be easily missed.

The renovated Bourbaki Panorama (041 412 30 30; www.bourbkipanorama.ch; Löwenplatz 11; adult/student & senior SFr8/7; 9am-6pm) is a very professional depiction of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71, with a moving narrative (in English) that brings to life the 1100-sq-metre circular painting of miserable-looking troops and civilians. All the same, it’s hard to see the panorama appealing to those without a specific military interest.

Historisches Museum
This strip of rock bears the scars (including huge potholes) inflicted on it by the glacier that slid over it some 20 million years ago. The best thing about the garden, though, is its kitschy 1001-night mirror maze. The Alpineum (041 410 40 64; www.alpineum.ch; Denkmalsstrasse 11; adult/student SFr5/4; 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Apr-Oct) opposite is a musty collection of Alpine relief maps and can be easily missed.

Festivals & Events
Lucerne’s six-day Fasnacht celebrations are more boisterous and fun than Basel’s famous carnival. The party kicks off on ‘Dirty Thursday’ with the emergence of the character ‘Fritschi’ from a window in the town hall, when bands of musicians and revellers take to the streets. The carnival moves through increasingly raucous celebrations climaxing on Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday), and is over on Ash Wednesday.

The musical Lucerne Festival (tickets 041 226 44 80; info 041 226 44 00; www.lucernefestival.ch) is divided into three separate seasons, Easter, summer and ‘Piano’ (in November). Concerts take place in the KKL (opposite). Lucerne has several public holidays in addition to national ones: Corpus Christi (30 May), Assumption (15 August), St Leodegar’s (8 December), Immaculate Conception (8 December), New Year’s Eve and 2 January.

Walking Tour
Start by crossing the Kapellbrücke (1; p214) from the south to the north bank, admiring
the illustrated roof panels in order as you go. Double back to the south bank along the modern, concrete Rathaussteg bridge, arriving in front of the Jesuitenkirche (2), the oldest baroque church in Switzerland. Behind this lies the medieval Franziskanerkirche (3), which has been frequently altered since its original construction in the 13th century. The nearby Rittersche palace (4) was built in 1577 for the city’s mayor, but now houses the cantonal government.

Continue west along the south bank, past the Nadelwehr (5), or water spikes, once used to regulate the river’s water levels. Skirt left around the Naturhistorisches Museum (6; p217) and cross the Spreuerbrücke (7; p214).

You’re now in Mühleplatz on the edge of the old city. Veer right into Weinmarkt, as you admire the painted façades on several of the historic buildings. Then exit into Hirschenplatz, where you’ll see a building with a drawing of Goethe, boasting that the writer once lodged here in 1779. Follow with a drawing of Goethe, boasting that
eral of the historic buildings. Then exit into
as you admire the painted façades on sev-

of the old city. Veer right into Weinmarkt,
go. Double back to the south bank along
the illustrated roof panels in order as you

218
SKIRT LEFT ALONG MÜHLEPLATZ.

Rathaussteg bridge, before emerg-
ing on the waterfront but away from the
bustling tourist zone, this friendly
budget hotel feels like an upmarket hostel,
with spotless rooms in varying cheerful col-
our schemes. Some have balconies.

finally, make your way back along Sch-
nerhofgut to Rathausquai and choose
one of the restaurants or cafés facing the
waterfront to enjoy a drink.

Sleeping BUDGET
Hostels

Backpackers Lucerne (01 360 04 20; www.backpackerslucerne.ch; Alpenquai 42; dm Sfr28; d Sfr60; c reception 7-10am & 4-11pm) Cheerfully decorated, with balconies overlooking the lake in a leafy spot, this friendly former students’ residence makes a superlative backpackers’ hostel. Facilities include kitchen and laundry. It’s a 15-minute walk southeast of the train station.

SYHA hostel (01 410 40 80; www.youthhostel.ch/luzern; Sihlstrasse 12; dm/d Sfr12/20.82; check-in 2pm-midnight in summer, from 4pm in winter. ) Although modern, well-run and clean, this hostel’s location north of the centre is not particularly convenient. It still gets busy in summer, though, when it’s best to book.

Pensions & Hotels
Tourist Hotel (01 410 24 74; www.touristhotel.ch; St-Karl-Quai 12; dm Sfr53-45, s/d Sfr70/100, with bathroom Sfr90/120. ) On a good day, the atmosphere at this cozy, stylish residence feels like a upmarket hostel, with spotless rooms in varying cheerful colour schemes. Some have balconies.

Bed and Breakfast (01 310 15 14; www.themandb.ch; Taubenhaustrasse 34; d with shared bathroom Sfr60/120; . ) This renovated novelty is a pastry, and fussier guests might find that the cheaper rooms all too accurately re-create the jail experience. With cell doors and barred windows, they consist of little more than a bed, bare floorboards and a prefabricated bathroom. They do for a short stay, however, while the suites are more congenial.

Also recommended:

Hotel Alpha (01 240 42 80; www.hotelalpaha.ch; Zähringerstrasse 24; s/d Sfr75/110) Simple but clean lodgings, about a 10-minute walk from the centre.

Pension Villa Maria (01 370 21 19; villama@bluewin.ch; Haldenstrasse 36; d with shared/private bathroom Sfr130/160; . (check-in Nov-Feb. ) Friendly granny-chic pension near the Transport Museum. Most rooms share facilities.

Camping
Camping Lido (01 370 21 46; www.camping-inter
national.ch; Ludistrasse 8; camp sites per adult/tent Sfr90/10, plus Sfr5 for electricity, cabin beds Sfr20; . 15 Mar–31 Oct) The well-equipped ground is on the lake’s northern shore, east of town. It also has six-bed wooden cabins (no breakfast, sleeping bag required). Get bus No 6, 8 or 24 or a boat to the Verkehrshaus.

MIDRANGE & TOP END
Most of the following hotels offer discounted rates during winter – sometimes up to one-third off.

Hotel zum Rebstock (01 410 35 81; www.here
ware.ch; Steeg, 2; d/tr Sfr160/210; . ) Spread over two houses – one still with medieval wooden beams and low ceilings – Rebstock’s excellent rooms are tastefully decorated in a range of styles from urban to rustic and colonial to romantic. In three of them, funky tile decorations have been used to turn the bathrooms into works of art.

Hotel Hofgarten (01 410 88 88; www.hofgar
ten.ch; Stadthofstrasse 14; s/d from Sfr195/295/335; . ) One sister hotel also has striking, individually decorated rooms, but in a slightly more streamlined fashion. The Mies van der Rohe furniture in No 226 sets the tone.

Hotel des Alpes (01 410 58 25; www.desalpes-
luzern.ch; Rathausquai 5; s/d from Sfr125/195) The best of the several hotels along this noisy strip, Hotel des Alpes’ rooms are older in style, but the place is well-maintained and overlooks the river near the Kapellbrücke.

Hotel Waldstätterhof (01 227 12 71; www.hotel
-waldstatterhof.ch; Zentralstrasse 4; s Sfr150-170, d Sfr190-
270; . ) Surprisingly good for a hotel right opposite the train station, this temple hotel has jauntily decorated modern rooms behind its faux Gothic, red-brick exterior.

Hotel des Balances (01 418 28 28; www.balances.
ch; Weinmarkt 6; s/d Sfr200-350, s/d Sfr300-420; . ) City
tour guides frequently describe this four-star hotel’s historic frescoed façade as the city’s most beautiful, and the rooms inside are elegant, too. Be warned, however, that the Weinmarkt square can be noisy at night, so book rooms facing the river if possible.

Hotel Krone (01 419 44 00; www.krone-luzern.
ch; Weinmarkt 12; s/d Sfr185/290) The central Krone combines an ornate historic façade with modern, pastel-coloured rooms throughout. Those facing the square are noisier.

Hotel Montana (01 419 00 00; www.hotel-mon
tana.ch; Adligenswilstrasse 22; s/d Sfr195-295; s/d Sfr200-
440; . ) This opulent Art Deco hotel perches on a hill overlooking the lake and is reached by its own funicular. Many of the generously sized bedrooms enjoy fantastic views, as do...
the breakfast room, terrace and the barrel-
hall entrance.

Hotel (041 226 68 68; www.the-hotel.ch; Sempach-
erstrasse 14; ste from Sfr350-540; B) Be a film star in
your own bedroom in architect Jean Nouvel’s
low-lit design hotel, which features a scene
from a different arthouse movie on the ceil-
ing of each sleek matt-black suite.

Palace Luzern (041 416 16 16; www.palace-luzern.
ch; Loetzstrasse 1; mains Sfr18-20; 7am-11pm Mon-Sat)
This huge luxury hotel on the waterfront is a
favourite with the Condé Nast set for its
belle époque style. Given its supposed pre-
eminence, though, some finishes look a
 touch less than perfect. Some guests find it
slightly overpriced.

Eating

Bodu (041 410 01 77; Kornmarkt 5; mains Sfr18-45)
This French brasserie is a local institution,
celebrated for its Parisian-cafè interior, Bor-
deaux wines and excellent river views. It
specialises in Provençale cuisine, but also
brings a range of world dishes in woks at lunch
and dinner.

Hofgarten (041 41 0 01 77; Kornmarkt 5; soups &
 salads from Sfr9.50, mains Sfr16-19; 7am-6pm Mon-Sat)
Enjoy the best vegetarian food in town in this
restaurant’s leafy garden. The specialities
range from braised aubergine to Thai curry
and Alpine macaroni – just a few of the
other dishes served in this updated but still
cosy, former tavern.

AUTHOR’S CHOICE

Wirtshaus Taube (041 210 07 47; Burg-
erstrasse 3; mains Sfr18-40; freshly baked bread, veal
or pork sausages with onion sauce, venison
and Alpine macaroni are just a few of the
other dishes served in this updated but still
cosy, former tavern.

in summer, sit under the ar-

cades facing the waterfront.

Wirtshaus Galiläer (041 240 10 01; Schützenstrasse
1; mains Sfr20-50; lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, closed Jul-
mid-Aug) This very old fashioned restaurant is not
without charm. The family has owned it
since 1856 and many groups of customers
seem to be regulars, which bodes well for the
traditional Lucerne cuisine.

Hug (041 410 10 92; Mühleplatz 6; lunch menus Sfr17-
25; 7am-5pm Mon-Sat) This traditional café on
the waterfront serves excellent breakfasts,
delicious cakes and confectionery, plus cheap
Swiss and Lucerne specialities. It’s a success-
ful chain with about 15 outlets.

Heini (041 412 20 20; Am Falkenplatz) Heini
has since mushroomed into a successful
bakery/confectionery chain, but this was
one of the original outlets and has an at-
mospheric ‘grand café’ as well as a takeaway
shop.

Manor (cnr Thellungasse & Weggisgasse) This branch
of the national supermarket restaurant chain
is noteworthy for its panoramic roof
terrace.

Drinking & Entertainment

Rathaus Bräueri (041 410 52 57; Unter den Egg
2; 9am-midnight) A traditional brewpub with
home-brewed beer under the vaulted arches of
this atmospheric tavern, or nab a pave-
tment table and watch the river flow.

Penthouse (Astoria Hotel, Pilatusstrasse 29) This is
a ritzy rooftop bar with plump sofas where,
beside the great view, the clientele are bus-

cierly discreetly checking each other out. On
the ground floor in the same hotel, you’ll
find the door to the equally posh, but very
popular Pravda nightclub (open Wednes-
day to Saturday) – a place where Ministry of
Sound DJs have regular residencies.

ABC Club Mixx (041 240 88 77; www.abcmix.ch;
Pilattusplatz; daily) This plush mainstream club
is unusually built inside a former cinema and
retains some of the logo in the entrance.

Loft (Haldenstrasse 21; Wed-Sun) With a steel-
and-concrete minimalist design, this atta-
s a trendy, well-dressed, but unpretentious,
young crowd and plays danceable house,
Latin, hip-hop and urban sounds.

Schür (041 368 10 30; www.schuur.ch; Tribüchen-
strasse 1; generally Wed-Sun) Laid-back DJ bar
and club attracting a mixed crowd (late 20s,
early 30s), although the mood depends on
the programme of music. Turn left just
after the railway bridge, then right.

Sedel (Emmenbrücke; always Fri & Sat, but some-
times also Mon & Thu) This formerly rundown,
squat-like former prison was undergoing
renovation at the time of writing, but should
still maintain a fairly underground air with
live industrial, experimental and punk music.
It’s near the SYHA hostel, behind Rotsee.

Restaurant Stadtkeller (041 410 47 33; Sternen-
platz 3) Folkloric tourist trap.

Shopping

Fruit and vegetable stalls spring forth along
the river quays every Tuesday and Saturday
morning. There’s also a flea mar-
ket (Burgerstrasse/Reusssteg) every Saturday from
May to October.

Getting There & Away

Hourly trains connect Lucerne to Interlaken
(Sfr29, two hours, via the scenic Brünig Pass),
Bern (Sfr34, 1½ hours), Lugano (Sfr56, 2½
hours) and Geneva (Sfr70, 3¼ hours, via
Olten and Lugano). Zürich-bound trains are
hourly (Sfr22, one hour).

The N2 (E9) motorway connecting Basel
and Lugano runs by Lucerne, and the N14
provides the road link to Zürich.

BOAT

For information on boat trips, see the quays
around Bahnhofplatz/Europaplatz.

Getting Around

Should you be going further than the largely
pedestrianised Old Town, city buses leave
from outside the Hauptbahnhof at Bahnh-
hofplatz. Tickets cost Sfr2 for a short jour-
ney, Sfr2.60 for one zone and Sfr3.80 for
two. Ticket dispensers indicate the correct
care for each destination. The 24-hour pass
(Sfr9.50) covers all zones, though with a
stamped Luzern guide you can get a three-
day bus ticket for Sfr14 and Swiss Pass hold-
ers travel free. There’s an underground car
park at the train station.

AROUND LUCERNE

Alphornbauer Stocker

The Alphorn workshop Stocker (041 340 88
86; Industrie Schweifhof, CH6010 Kriens-Luzern; admission
free; 8am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat)
is south of Lucerne in Schweifhof (take bus No 1 to Kriens, then bus No 16 to Oberkuoni-
matt). Here you can learn all about these
huge, unwieldy Alpine instruments are
made and have the chance not only to
buy, but also to blow your own horn.

Glasi Hergiswil

A visit to Hergiswil Glassworks (041 630 12 23;
www.glasi.ch; Steesertasse 12; admission free;
9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat; glass-blowing only until noon on Sat)
is instructive and interesting, with the chance
to see glass-blowing in action and buy souve-
nirs, after listening to an audiovisual history.
The factory is between Lucerne and Alpnach-
stad, and is an easy stopover on a round-trip
up to Mt Pilatus (p222). Make sure your train
stops at Hergiswil, however, as not all do.

LAKE LUCERNE

It’s possible to feel the call of the mountains
even while standing in downtown Lucerne.
Majestic peaks hunch over the coastline of
the adjacent Lake of the Four Forest Can-
tons, or Viervlaldstättersee – which twists
and turns as much as the tongue does while
saying that. (Little wonder English speakers
use the shorthand Lake Lucerne.)

With Mt Pilatus, Mt Rigi and the Stanser-
horn all having lookouts on their summits,
you’re really spoilt for choice. But, rest
assured, any view across the shimmering
expanse of water to the green hillsides,
meadows and valleys beyond is never dis-
appointing.

And apart from its many mountain look-
out points, the lake also offers pleasant little
tucked-away resorts, which can be reached
by boat. The far eastern reach of Lake Lucerne – Lake Uri or Urnersee – has special significance for the Swiss, as it’s home to the Rüti meadow where the country was supposedly born.

**Getting Around**

The Lake Lucerne Navigation Company SGV (041 367 67 67; www.lakelucerne.ch in German) operates boats (sometimes paddle-steamers) daily. This excludes the Lake Uri section of the region’s most popular destinations. According to legend, this rugged 2120m peak was named after Pontius Pilate, whose corpse was thrown into a small lake on its summit and who has haunted its heights ever since. In reality, however, the moniker is more likely deriving from the Latin word pileatus, meaning covered in clouds – as the mountain frequently is.

The classic ‘golden round-trip’ takes bus No 1 to Kriens and the cable car, via Kriensereg and Fräkmüntegg, up to Mt Pilatus. From the summit, the world’s steepest cog railway (at a maximum gradient of 48%) brings you down to Alpnachstad, from where a lake steamer heads back to Lucerne the same day.

The reverse route (Alpnachstad–Pilatus–Kriens–Lucerne) is much less crowded, however, and from November to May only the Kriens route is open, meaning you have to retrace your steps up the mountain and back during that time of year. Even this route is closed for the last two weeks of October, while the cable cars are serviced.

Total cost of the return trip is Sfr79.80 (Sfr40.80/43.20/52.30 with valid Swiss/Eurail/Inter Rail passes). If you wish to walk part of the way, it is three hours down from the summit to Alpnachstad, 3½ hours to Kriens and three hours down to Hergiswil boat station. The walk from Fräkmüntegg is easier. It’s more traditional, and arguably more worthwhile, to stay overnight at Mt Rigi (right), but there are two hotels found on Pilatus. The 19th-century Pilatus Kulm (041 670 12 55; hotelpilatus.ch; s/d with shared bathroom Sfr80/125) and the modern Hotel Bellevue (s/d Sfr110/195) share the same reception in the circular building. There’s also a self-service restaurant on this peak.

**STANZERHORN**

At 1898m, the Stanserhorn (www.stanserhorn.ch) is the second-tallest mountain on the lake. It also boasts the only revolving restaurant in the region, and offers 360-degree views looking towards Titlis.

The journey up is by ‘old-timer’ funicular from the village of Stans to Kälti, then a cable car. Both operate from mid-April to mid-November. The funicular’s base station is a five-minute walk (signposted) from the Stans train station.

The return journey costs Sfr59 from Lucerne, or Sfr52 if you’re staying in Stans. Alternatively, you can save more money by hiking up (4½ hours) or down (3½ hours) from the village. If you have a car you can save nearly an hour by driving up to Kalti and parking there.

Stans is on the Lucerne–Engelberg railway (one way from Lucerne Sfr60.80). The tourist office (041 610 88 33; www.lakeluzern.ch; Bahnhofplatz 4; 9am-noon & 2-5pm) offers sightseeing trips in the village and helps out with accommodation. The expansive Dorfplatz, the hub of the charming town centre, is located behind the station, overlooked by an early baroque church and surrounded by pleasant streets to stroll. Here, too, is the well-regarded Hotel Engel (041 619 10 10; www.engelstans.ch; Dorfplatz 1; s/d from Sfr80/140/165/190), a striking mix of historic exterior and new designer rooms.

**BECKENRIED**

Beckenried, on the southern shore, is a bus ride from Stans. Just a few minutes’ walk from the boat station is a cable car that makes the 10-minute ascent to Klewenalp (www.klewenalp.ch; return Sfr19/30). This is a much underrated skiing destination, especially for beginners, plus it offers many hiking and mountain biking trails heading into the hills and valleys beyond. A map at the top outlines the options.

**MT RIGI**

Who would ever need TV when you have the astounding views from this ‘Queen of the Mountains’? On a clear day, there’s an impressive wall of mountain peaks to the south and east from 1797m-tall Rigi (www.rigi.ch) including Mt Titlis and the giants of the Jungfrau region. To the north and west, you overlook Arth-Goldau and the Zugsee, curving around until it almost joins Küsnacht and an arm of Lake Lucerne.

Most of all, sunrise is primeviewing around here. Since the 19th century, tourists have been staying at the Rigi Kulm Hotel (041 855 03 03; rigikulm@bluewin.ch; dm Sfr32; s/d Sfr67/110, with bathroom Sfr105/186; ) and getting up before the crack of dawn to see the blazing sun light up the sky. (Today’s hotel, a 20th-century re-creation of the original, is the only major establishment at the summit, and has two restaurants and a small snack kiosk.)

After this, there’s little left to do but walk down this hikers’ paradise of a mountain. For recommended routes, check www.rigi.ch. There are several easy walks (1½ to two hours) down from Rigi Kulm to Rigi Kaltbad and a fold-out map makes the views. Or, ask at the tourist offices at Lucerne (041 227 17 17; Zentralstrasse 5) or Weggis (041 390 11 55) for information on the lengthy Rigi Lehenweg route around the mountain.

Hiking up the mountain is another story. It’s at least a 4½-hour trek from Weggis, but you could take the cable car from Küsnacht to Seeboldenapalp (one way/return Sfr12/18) to shorten the journey. There are two paths from there, the shortest of which takes a little over two hours. The last section is quite steep, however. (While hiking on Rigi, watch out for the Chlyni Lüüt, tiny ‘wild folk’ with supernatural powers who in mythology once inhabited Rigi!)

For those of a less energetic bent, two rival rack railways carry passengers to the top. One runs from Arth-Goldau, the other from Vitznau. Either costs Sfr35/58 one way/return. The Arth-Goldau service closes for two weeks in late May, but Vitznau operates year-round.

The Vitznau track gives the further option of diverting at Rigi Kaltbad and taking
the cable car to/from Weggis instead. The whole trip can be done from Lucerne for Sfr89 (Sfr29/29/44.50 with Swiss/Erail/Inter Rail Pass).

Weggis
pop 3000 / elevation 440m
Sheltered from cold northerly winds by Mt Rigi, Weggis enjoys an unusually mild climate, sprouting a few palm trees and figs on the shores of the lake. Today, it’s hard to believe this genteel resort was the birthplace of the rebellious ‘Modernder Bund’ art movement, the forrerunner of Dada. Its small-town friendliness is extremely welcoming, but boats in and out of the resort are sparse in the evening and a few days’ stopover generally suffices. A cable car runs from here up to Rigi Kallbad (one way/return Sfr25/42).

Tourist office (041 390 11 55; www.weggis.ch; 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2.30pm Sat & Sun in summer, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri in winter) is next to the boat station. Ask about bike rentals (per hour Sfr18).

Budget Hotel Weggis (041 390 11 11; www.budgethotels.ch; Parkstrasse 29; s/d/tr from Sfr77/650/86.50, with bathroom Sfr66.50/111.50/116.50; reception 3-9pm) keeps even pernickety customers happy, with its simple, if not especially atmospheric, rooms even pernickety customers happy, with its simple, if not especially atmospheric, rooms and high standards of cleanliness. This excellent cheap choice lies up the hill from the central square.

SeeHotel Gotthard (041 390 21 14; www.gotthard-weggis.ch; s/d/tr from Sfr135/210; (0 closed mid- Oct– mid-Dec) is a pleasant midrange hotel with checked bedspreads and curtains and a handy location on the waterfront minutes from where boats dock.

Park Hotel Weggis (041 392 05 05; www.phw.ch; Hertensteinstrasse 34; s/d/tr from Sfr40/515; (0 (P) has two turreted buildings that house one of Switzerland’s top five holiday hotels (it was good enough for the Brazilian national football team). It boasts elegant, understated rooms, a well-equipped spa and even a private beach.

See Café Weggis (041 390 17 38; Seestrasse 6; dishes Sfr13-25; (0 7am-1pm Jul & Aug, closed Thu Sep-Jun) is a popular local meeting place, serving down-to-earth meals, coffee and cake.

Grape (041 392 07 07; Seestrasse 60; pizza/pasta from Sfr14.50, mains from Sfr25; (0 10-12.30am) is a trendy Californian restaurant – part of the Park Hotel complex – serving wines from the Napa Valley alongside a range of delicious international cuisine. Asian and fusion dishes, Mexican classics and curries join wood-fired pizzas on the menu.

LAKE URI

With its many historical landmarks, the Lake Uri lake (Uri, Schwyz and Nidwalden in 1291 and later where General Guisan gathered the Swiss army during WWII in a show of force against potential invaders. As such, this is hallowed ground to the Swiss and the focal point of national day celebrations on 1 August. On any ordinary day, there’s always a flag flying proudly, and there’s a small museum and a souvenir shop which doubles as a café.

Another port of call is the Tellskapell (Wilhelm Tell Chapel). The walls are covered in murals depicting four episodes in the Tell legend, including the one that’s supposed to have occurred on this spot, his escape from Gessler’s boat (see the boxed text The William Tell Tale, opposite). There’s a huge carillon that chimes behind the chapel.

After crossing into another founding canton, Uri, the boat finally pulls in at Flüelen. Flüelen is important because it’s the entry point to Rigi Kaltbad (one way/return Sfr25/42). However, if you want to get even higher, contact Touch and Go (041 820 54 31; www.paragliding.ch; Parkstrasse 14) for tandem paragliding flights (from Sfr170).

BRUNNEN
pop 7000 / elevation 443m
Situated on the shore where Lake Lucerne and Lake Uri (Urnersee) meet at right angles, Brunnen enjoys mesmerising views south and west. As the local Fähn wind rushes down from the mountains, it creates the perfect conditions for sailing, windsurfing and paragliding.

Information
Tourist office (041 825 00 40; www.brunnen.tourismus.ch; Bahnhofstrasse 15; (0 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug; 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Jun & Sep; 8.30am-noon & 1.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri Oct-May) Has information and Internet access. The office is less than five minutes from the train station (following the signs), which has money-exchange counters and bike rental available daily. Don’t forget to ask about the guest card.

Activities
Most people will be suitably impressed by the wonderful views of Lakes Uri and Lucerne from the Urmiberg (cable car one way/return Sfr11/19). However, if you want to get even higher, contact Touch and Go (041 820 54 31; www.paragliding.ch; Parkstrasse 14) for tandem paragliding flights (from Sfr170).

Sleeping & Eating
Two camping grounds in west Brunnen are open in summer: Camping Urmiberg (041 820 33 27; camp sites per person/tent/car Sfr60.90/3.50/2.50) and Camping Hopfren (041 820 18 73; camp sites per person/tent/car Sfr60.90/3.50/2.50).

THE WILLIAM TELL TALE
Really, the Swiss have a German playwright and an Italian musician to thank for their national hero. For without Friedrich Schiller’s 1804 play Wilhelm Tell and Rossini’s 1829 opera Guilleremo Tell, the legend would not have so lodged in the global consciousness. After all, tales of sharp-shooting archers forced to knock objects off the heads of small boys had been doing the rounds in Norse mythology aeons earlier – pretty much ruling out the chance that any real William Tell existed. But when the Swiss began to chafe under the yoke of Austrian dominance during the 13th century, they made the story their own.

In their adaptation, the Austrian bailiff of Uri and Schwyz, Hermann Gessler, placed his hat on a pole in Altdorf town square. Everyone was required to bow to this symbol of Habsburg rule. However, William Tell from Bürglen neglected to do so and was stopped. Gessler knew of Tell’s reputation with a crossbow and decreed he would forfeit his life and that of his son, unless he shot an apple off his son’s head. To Gessler’s disappointment, Tell succeeded. Yet Gessler noticed Tell’s crossbow stunt and decreed he would forfeit his life and that of his son, unless he shot an apple off his son’s head. To Gessler’s disappointment, Tell succeeded. Yet Gessler noticed Tell’s shooting archers forced to knock objects off the heads of small boys had been doing the rounds in Norse mythology aeons earlier – pretty much ruling out the chance that any real William Tell existed. But when the Swiss began to chafe under the yoke of Austrian dominance during the 13th century, they made the story their own.

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As they crossed the lake, Fähn wind whipped up and threatened to capsize the boat. Tell, who was also a master helmsman, was untied to guide the boat to safety and took the chance to steer close to the shore. He leapt from the boat and onto a rock (at the site of the Tellskapell), at the same time pushing the boat back into the stormy waves. Realising his family would never be safe from Gessler, Tell raced to Küssnacht to ambush the tyrant. He hid by the Hohle Gasse, a sunken lane. As the bailiff and his entourage approached, Tell killed Gessler with a single arrow through the heart. This version initially grew in Swiss legend through word of mouth, its first written incarnation appearing in the Weisses Buch (White Book) of Sarnen around 1470. But Schiller and Rossini put it on the world stage. Even today, Rossini’s William Tell Overture remains instantly recognisable – even though that’s more to do with another do-gooder outlaw, the Lone Ranger of classic TV fame.
Alpina (041 820 18 13; www.alpina-brunnen.ch; Gersaustrasse 12; s Sfr90-120, d Sfr140-180, apt per week Sfr850; ) Though it lacks lake views, this family-run hotel is Brunnen’s friendliest and most creative. Rooms have a cozy Swiss feel, which is offset by eye-catching arrangements of stones, plants and odd-shaped tree branches in the stairwell and public rooms. There’s an Alpine garden in the grounds and homemade jam at breakfast. Book well ahead.

Hotel Alfa + Schmid (041 820 1882; www.schmidalfa.ch; Axenstrasse S-7; s Sfr66-90, d Sfr110-170) Spread across two buildings facing the lake, this hotel has a renowned restaurant and rooms to suit most tastes. Those in the Schmid building have been renovated, although the bedrooms still exude a traditional style, those in the Alfa are cosily modern. Budget rooms forego the best views.

Waldstätterhof (041 825 06 06; www.waldstatterhof.ch; Waldstätterquai 6; s Sfr180-200, d Sfr270-320) Popular with honeymooners, including one-time English PM Winston Churchill, this grand hotel combines elegant rooms in neutral tones, lake views and a romantic atmosphere.

Weisses Rössli (041 820 10 22; fax 041 820 11 22; Bahnhofstrasse 8; s with shared/private bathroom Sfr65/80, d Sfr100/140) Recently rebuilt in its traditional 19th-century style after a devastating fire.

Mezzalotto (041 820 08 08; Axenstrasse 9; mains from Sfr6-25; 11-13.30am, closed Sat & Sun in winter) This Mexican eatery is among the waterfront restaurants that are hard to miss.

Park Restaurant (041 825 47 26; Gersaustrasse 8; mains Sfr12-24; 11am-5pm Sun-Wed, 11am-11pm Thu-Sun) Attached to the Aeskulap Klinik, this vegetarian and fish restaurant has a slightly worthy air about it, but you know the food is as healthy as it is tasty.

Dodo Bar & Café (Bahnhofstrasse 10) This place doubles as a very pleasant coffee house and a trendy bar.

Getting There & Away

By far the most pleasant way to get to Brunnen is to take a boat from Lucerne (Sfr28, 1½ hours). The train (Sfr15.20, 45 minutes to one hour) is cheaper and quicker, although often a change in Arth-Goldau is necessary. There are also road connections from Lucerne, Zug and Füelien.

SCHWYZ CANTON

Schwyz’s claim to fame is that it gave Switzerland its name, and together with the communities of Uri and Nidwalden signed the Oath of Eternal Alliance of 1291. This birth certificate of the Swiss Confederation is still proudly displayed in Schwyz town.

Schwyz pop 13,934 / elevation 517m

Schwyz seems an unassuming little village camped in farming land beneath the twin peaks of the Mythen mountains (1898m and 1811m). However, it is home to the most important document in Swiss history, is the birthplace of the original Swiss army knife and also provides the perfect jumping-off point for tours to the Höllolch Caves, Europe’s largest underground caverns.

Orientation & Information

Schwyz train station is in the Seewien district, 2km from the centre. To reach the centre, take any bus outside the station marked Schwyz Post, and alight at Postplatz. The tourist office (041 810 19 91; www.wbs.ch; Bahnhofstrasse 4; 7.30am-noon & 1-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat) is by the bus station, with plenty of literature on the area.

Sights

The Bundesbriefmuseum (Museum of Federation; 041 819 20 64; www.szb.ch; Bahnhofstrasse 20; adult/student Sfr4/2.50; 9.30-11.30am & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30-5pm Sat & Sun May-Oct; 9.30-11.30am & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri, 1.30-5pm Sat & Sun Nov-Apr) is home to the 1291 charter of federation signed by Nidwalden, Schwyz and Uri, which is regarded as having launched modern Switzerland. It’s accompanied by restatements in German (rather than the original Latin) after important military events, such as Morgarten in 1315, or as more cantons came aboard. There’s some academic discussion in German and French about the authenticity of the 1291 document, as many historians question the accuracy of Switzerland’s founding ‘myths’. An explanatory English booklet is available from the front desk.

In any case, the building’s murals and other artworks, from Heinrich Danieth’s Fundamentum on the façade to Walter Clénin’s Oath on the Rütli in the main hall, are more immediately appealing. Don’t overlook Josef Rickenbacker’s witty metal reliefs, The Stations of the Swiss Cross, in the portico – which you needn’t pay to see.

The town’s Hauptplatz (main square) is a pleasant place to sit while taking in the fountain and Rathaus (town hall), complete with 19th-century murals depicting the Battle of Morgarten and other historic events. On the other side of the square lies St Martin’s Church.

The Forum der Schweizer Geschichte (Forum of Swiss History; 041 819 60 11; www.musee-suisse.com, www.museeschweiz.ch; adult/student & senior Sfr6/b; 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) is well curated and has interesting displays, but is mostly of interest for its special exhibitions.

The Ital Reding-Hofstatt (041 811 45 05; www.bir.ch; Rickenbachstrasse 24; adult/student & senior Sfr4/2.50; 2-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-noon & 2-5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Nov) was once the home of a mercenary soldier, many of whom came from Schwyz and returned home with their booty. Now it’s a museum revisiting its former master’s lifestyle. Across the complex is House Bethlehem, a tiny proportioned ancient house dating back to 1287.

Off Hauptplatz and down Schmiedgasse, opposite the Mythencenter shopping complex, is Victorinox (041 818 12 11; www.victorinox.ch; Schmiedgasse 57, 6438 Ibach; 7.30am-noon & 1.15-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat), the manufacturer of the original Swiss army knife. The company was founded in 1884 by Karl Elsener and, after a shaky start, hit pay dirt with its ‘Officer’s Knife’. You can’t visit the factory here, but the shop has a vast array of knives, corkscrews and watches, where you can take pleasure in buying at the source.

Activities

The Höllolch caves, Europe’s largest and the third biggest in the world, lie in Muotatal, some 35 minutes from Schwyz. More than 170km of tunnels carved out by underground streams have been mapped, while many remain unexplored. Book at Trekking Team (0848 808 007; 041 390 40 40; www.trekking.ch; short tours adult/child Sfr20/10, aperitif tours adult Sfr45, overnight tours from Sfr400), which even allows you to bivouac in the caves overnight.

Adventure Point (079 247 74 72; www.adventurepoint.ch; Hirschen Hotel, Hinterdorffstrasse 14) also offers a range of activities.

Plenty of hikes begin from the nearby peak of Stoos (www.stoos.ch). Check the website or ask the tourist office for details.

Sleeping & Eating

Hirschen (041 811 12 76; www.hirschen-schwyz.ch; Hinterdorffstrasse 14; dm Sfr26, s/d Sfr48/80, with bathroom)

A WORTHY CROSS TO BEAR

Once you cross the border into Switzerland, you’ll never have a second’s doubt about which country you’re visiting. The Swiss fly their national flag with a fervent patriotism, and the white cross on a red square flutters in thousands of private village gardens, as well as halfway up mountains and in the middle of waterfalls. The flag is distinctive for being the world’s only square flag, and locals might be attached to it simply because it looks so goddamn good. Its proportions are easy on the eye, and like all design classics, it’s clear and simple.

However, if Switzerland’s flag today is virtually a logo or brand image, it started life with a much more serious purpose; it was a means of identifying Swiss mercenaries on the battlefield. Two bits of white cloth were sewn onto the shirts of those from Central Switzerland fighting with Bernese troops during the 1339 Battle of Laupen, and this highly recognisable marker was gradually adopted for all Swiss soldiers.

General Henri Dufour, the victorious military leader in the Civil War, lobbied hard to finally persuade every canton to accept the red-and-white military flag as a federal emblem in 1840, but in the first decades of the new Swiss Confederation, debate raged about the emblem’s proportions. Finally, in 1889 the federal parliament voted for the current incarnation. Five years later, the Geneva-based International Red Cross adopted the reverse image.

Today, the Swiss are happy to slather their national logo over a range of clothing, accessories and household items, from tacky to chic. And in 2005, a report announced that, despite the vast array of utterly astonishing scenery the country boasts, the best-selling postcard in Switzerland – outselling its nearest competitor by three to two – is the one of the national flag.

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Engelberg

Getting There & Away

Engelberg is in a rail cul-de-sac, so getting there usually involves changing at Biberbrugg. This is rarely a problem as arrivals/departures coincide. It is also within range of the canton of Zürich’s S-Bahn trains. Zürich itself (Sfr16.20) is less than one hour away (via Wädenswil). There are trains to Lucerne (Sfr20.80, one hour), sometimes requiring a change at Goldau (70 min). From Engelberg to Schwyz, you can take the scenic ‘back route’ in summer: catch a postal bus to Oberiberg, then private bus (Swiss Pass not valid) from there.

By car, Einsiedeln is 5km off Hwy 8 between Schwyz and Rapperswil.

Einsiedeln

pop 3500 / elevation 1050m

Towering Mt Titlis has made Engelberg Central Switzerland’s best-known ski resort, as well as a popular day trip from Lucerne. The relatively humble village sits in a quiet, idyllic valley that’s lush and green in summer. However, the mountain is snow-capped all year and not only attracts summertime skiers and snowboarders, but also many Bollywood film crews and fans.

Orientation

The main street is Dorfstrasse (partially pedestrianised), where you’ll find most of the town’s shops and restaurants. Many of these close in November, but the influx of Indian tourists in May and June ensures more of the village now stays open at the other end of the winter and summer seasons.

Information

The half-canton of Obwalden, which includes Engleberg, has a religious holiday on 25 September. 

Guest card

Good for various discounts, including 10% off the Mt Titlis cable car.

Hotel Linde

(0) 41 639 77 77; www.engelberg.ch;

Klosterstrasse 3; (2) 8am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-6pm Sun in peak season, 8am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat rest of year). A five-minute walk from the train station, in the Tourist Center.

Overview

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Sights

ENGELBERG MONASTERY
Engelberg’s Benedictine Monastery (041 639 61 19; tours around Sfr6; 45min tours 10am & 4pm daily, in English 10am Thu & Sat) is the only attraction in the village itself. The Engelberg village was once ecclesiastically governed, independently of the Swiss Confederation, and the monastery was the seat of power. Now the resident monks run instead of rule, but their home retains much of its former grandeur. Rebuilt after the last of several devastating fires in 1729, it contains rooms decorated with incredibly detailed wood inlays, and a baroque monastery church (admission free).

Inside the monastery, you’ll also find a state-of-the-art Show Cheese Dairy (041 638 08 88; www.schaukaeserei-engelberg.ch; admission free; 9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun) where you can watch the cheese-makers through a glass screen, enjoy their produce in the biscuit and cheese lake, and check on snow conditions before trying their delicious cheese.

Activities

MT TITLIS
Central Switzerland’s tallest mountain, Titlis (www.titlis.ch), is known for being reached by the world’s first revolving cable car. This was completed in 1992 and is still one of the few on the planet. However, that’s the last leg of a breath-taking four-stage journey. First, you must ascend to Gerschnialp (1300m). Then, in the same small cable car, you glide over cow pastures and up to Trübsee (1800m). Transferring to a large gondola, you head for Stand (2450m). Finally, in Stand you board the Rotair (only the cabin inside revolves) for the 130m dive. Contact Outventure (041 611 14 43; www.outventure.ch; Stansstad), which can also organise glacier-trekking, kayaking, rafting and canyoning.

ADVENTURE SPORTS
Adrenaline sports are another Engelberg pastime. If you want to bungee jump from a cable car at the top of Mt Titlis, between May and October, you can. It’s Sfr160 (Sfr130 on Friday) for the 130m dive. Contact Outventure (041 611 14 43; www.outventure.ch; Stansstad), which can also organise glacier-trekking, kayaking, rafting and canyoning.

Sleeping

Hotel Bellevue-Terminus (041 639 68 68; www.bellevue-engelberg.ch; Bahnhofplatz; s/d Sfr44/88, with bath room Sfr100/175; C year-round; P) The very picture of faded grandeur, this Victorian-era hotel has lots of students and other youthful guests treading over its wonderfully creaky floorboards. Little wonder, since it offers great value and comfort for the price.

Hotel Edelweiss (041 639 78 78; www.edelweissengelberg.ch; Terraserstrasse 10; s/d from Sfr115/200) This grand old hotel has long been a family friendly establishment, with colourful paintings of cloths decorating its stairwell. All guests, though, will enjoy the views from its high-ceilinged dining room.

Hotel Terrace (041 639 66 66; www.terrace.ch; Terraserstrasse 33; standard s/d from Sfr115/180, superior s/d from Sfr125/200; C closed b/w seasons) The Terrace’s dining room retains original Art Nouveau features, but its 180 rooms are somewhat newer and more ordinary, with overwhelmingly dusky pink hues. Still, the views are magnificent and you feel privileged catching the hotel’s private funicular up the hill behind Engelberg. A favourite with Indian directors and film crews.

Hotel Cathrin (041 637 44 66; www.cathrin-engelberg.ch; Birrenweg 22; s/d from Sfr95/170; C closed b/w seasons; P) In a quiet location near the Mt Titlis cable car, this modern re-creation of a chalet has sauna and fitness facilities, as well as a conservatory.

SYHA hostel (041 637 12 92; www.symswitzerland.ch; Dorfstrasse 80; dm Sfr32.40/B4.80; C closed b/w seasons; P) This hostel is 10 minutes back down the train line on the northern side of the tracks. It’s clean, roomy and modern, but some of its dorms are insanely large.

Camping Einenwäldli (041 637 19 49; www.eienwaelderli.ch; camp sites per person/small tent/car Sfr8.50/20; C year-round) This deluxe camping ground, attached to the Sporthotel Einenwäldli, has access to its restaurant and sauna facilities. The ski and shuttle buses will drop you less than a minute from the gate.

Eating & Drinking

Alpenclub (041 637 12 43; Dorfstrasse; mains Sfr18-48; 09am-late daily, closed Tue & Wed Jul & Aug) The atmosphere is wonderful in this low-ceilinged complex, with carved-back chairs and lampshades made from sepia-toned negatives of early mountaineering adventures. A long-standing local institution, it serves a mix of pizzas and Swiss food.

Axels Restaurant & Wine Bar (041 637 09 09; Dorfstrasse 50; mains Sfr40-50; 11am-2pm & 6pm-12.30am Wed-Sun) This chic minimalist restaurant wouldn’t be out of place in Zürich or Geneva and indeed has garnered international attention with its Mediterranean-influenced cuisine. Head chef Axel Kirchner gently tweaks classic carpaccio, lasagne and risotto dishes, giving them a modern twist.

Zur Alten Post (041 637 25 24; Dorfstrasse; meals Sfr15-25; 09am-7pm) Nothing fancy, just a firm everyday favourite for coffee or a hearty lunch of rösti or Alpenmarginen (a form of macaroni cheese).

Mexican-style bar and restaurant Yucatan (Hotel Bellevue-Terminus) is the most popular après-ski place in town.

Getting There & Around

Engelberg is at the end of a train line, about an hour from Lucerne (Sfr15.60 one way). If coming on a day trip, check the Lucerne tourist office’s special Mt Titlis excursion tickets.

Between early July and mid-October, a shuttle bus leaves the Engelberg train station roughly every half-hour for all the village’s major hotels and attractions. It’s free with a guest card or train ticket; Sfr1
without. In winter, there are free ski buses for getting to the slopes.

ZUG CANTON

ZUG

pop 22,917 / elevation 426m

To look at Zug, with its attractive medieval Old Town and placid lake, you might not immediately realise the enormous wealth beneath. With the lowest tax in Switzerland – about half the national average – this is the richest place in the country, but with typical Swiss modesty it doesn’t boast about its riches. Undoubtedly, after an hour in town, you start to notice all the people in suits and a few more luxury cars than normal. However, like all good Swiss companies, Zugs go about their business quietly, leaving other visitors in peace to absorb the scenery.

Sights & Activities

The Zug funicular will take you up the Zugberg (988m), where there are impressive views, or hiking trails for the more active. The Zug day pass (Sfr11.40) is the best deal, as it covers all bus rides and the funicular. Bus No 11 gets you to the lower funicular station.

City bikes (041 761 33 55; outside the Rathaus, Bundesplatz; 9am-9pm May-Oct) are loaned out for no cost (ID and monetary deposit required). On the waterfront, pedalos (per 30/60 minutes Sfr12/20) and other boats are for hire.

Eating

The best restaurants congregate around Langsdgmeindeplatz, and most have outdoor seating in summer. Fish from the lake is common; bream or Zug Rotel is a favourite.

Sights & Activities

Ochsen Zug (041 729 32 32; www.ochsen-zug.ch; Am Kolplanding; s/d/tr/tr titan Sfr175/210/255/320; €€) Although it dates from 1480 and once hosted Goethe, the Ochsen today is a business hotel and has been streamlined behind its quaint façade. Standard rooms are white and black with a few daubs of colour. Newer rooms use natural wood and fibres for an ecologically sound feel. The junior suite, No 503, has wonderful views of the Zytzturm and the lake. Prices are about 10% to 20% cheaper on weekends.

Getting There & Away

Zug is on the main north–south train route from Zürich (Sfr13.40) to Lugano, where trains from Zürich also branch off to Lucerne (Sfr16.40) and the Bernese Oberland.

Boats depart from Zug’s Schifflstation, north of Langsdgmeindeplatz, travelling south to Arth in the summer and many other destinations around the lake. Swiss Pass holders get half-price travel.

GOTTHARD PASS – Andermatt

ANDERMATT

pop 1313 / elevation 1447m

At the southern end of the canton of Uri, Andermatt was once an important staging-post on the north–south St Gotthard route. Nowadays, the town is bypassed by the Gotthard Tunnel, but it remains a popular hiking and winter sports destination.

As Andermatt is situated near four major Alpine passes – Susten, Oberalp, St Gotthard and Furka – it’s an excellent base for driving or bus tours. Check www.post bus.ch for the bus tours offered this year.
From Realp, along the flat valley, steam trains (www.furka-bergstrecke.ch) run to Furka from Friday to Sunday between mid-June and early October (daily from mid-July to late August). The St Gotthard Museum (☎ 091 869 15 25; adult/student & senior Sfr6/4; 9am-6pm Jun-Oct), on the St Gotthard Pass (2109m), is open only when the pass itself is. It chronicles the history of the pass and the Gotthard Tunnel (there’s English text).

Sleeping
The tourist office can help find private rooms, but many places close in the low season.

**Hotel Aurora** (☎ 041 887 16 61; www.aurora-andermatt.ch; s/d Sfr90/150; P) Despite its fairly unexciting modern exterior, this hotel on the far south side of the village is handy for the Gemsstock cable car, has good views and provides great value. It’s popular with those doing motorcycle tours.

**Hotel 3 Könige & Post** (☎ 041 887 00 01; www.3koenige.ch Gotthardstrasse 69; s/d from Sfr95/180; P) With nostalgic rooms in a traditional Swiss chalet near the centre of the village, this hotel – like most in Andermatt – has a sauna, but it also boasts a eucalyptus steam bath.

**Kronen Hotel** (☎ 041 887 00 88; www.kronenhotel.ch; Gotthardstrasse 64; s/d from Sfr95/180; P) A friendly place with pleasant modern rooms. It’s known for its Barrybar – named after the famous St Bernard dog – and has an excellent menu.

**Getting There & Away**
Andermatt is a stop on the Glacier Express from Zermatt to St Moritz. For north–south destinations, change at Göschenen, 15 minutes away. **Andermatt train station** (☎ 041 887 12 20) can supply details about the car-carrying trains over the Oberalp Pass (direction: Graubünden) and through the Furka Tunnel (the route to Valais). Postbuses stop by the train station. The Gotthard Tunnel (N2/E35) is one of the busiest north–south routes across the Alps. The 17km tunnel opened in 1980, and extends from Göschenen to close to Airolo in Ticino, bypassing Andermatt. Work is already underway building the new Gotthard Base Tunnel, designed for high-speed and freight trains. It should be completed in 2012.