



## TRAVEL

## SWITZERLAND



By Richard Levy

A vacation in Switzerland offers visitors a delicious taste of three cultures all in one breathtaking country, roughly the size of New Jersey. This tiny alpine nation located on the borders France, Germany and Italy, embracing the traditions, languages, cuisine and architecture of neighboring countries melding them into a culture that is uniquely Swiss.

As Swiss trains pass through the different regions of the country, you'll hear announcements change from German to French to Italian while observing Swiss Chalets magically morphing into French Chateaus and then Mediterranean Villas with Palm trees. (Yes, there are Palm trees in

Switzerland!) Meanwhile, the menus will also start changing from Wursts and Schnitzel to Cassoulet and Coq au Vin and then into Pastas and Prosciutto.

Everything you experience in Switzerland has been influenced by its three very distinct cultures yet they all have the same special Swiss attributes: hospitality and cleanliness. Known as known as the "Innkeepers to the world," the Swiss are very welcoming to tourists and their hotels are uniformly "squeaky clean."

You'll very quickly discover that there is much more to Switzerland than Cuckoo Clocks, Cheese, Chocolate and Cows serenely grazing in Alpine meadows. Switzerland is a peaceful, idyllic country where you'll never hear the familiar warning: "when you see something, say something;" Despite being located right in the middle of Europe, the Swiss managed to remain

neutral during WW 2. A vacation here is an escape into a snow-capped "magical never-never-land" that feels very far removed from all the "crazy stuff" going on in the world.

Most travel experts agree that the very best way to explore Switzerland is on their very efficient train system. With the help of my friends at "Swiss Tourist Office in New York, I've created my own custom "Richard's Three-Cultures in Eight Days Train Tour," which will give you a taste of "Germany", France" and "Italy" all in one exciting, but still relaxing eight day vacation.

### "Richard's Eight-Day Three-Cultures Train Tour"

**Day 1: Arrival Zurich** – Lucerne (German Swiss) Take a taxi from the airport straight to the train station and don't worry, you'll get to spend time in Zurich after your Swiss train tour.)

**Lucerne** is one of Switzerland's most perfect medieval towns with architecture right out of the Middle Ages and original cobblestone, narrow winding streets. Visit the Chapel Bridge Water Tower and the famous dungeon where people were punished by placing them in small revolving cages. (50 Shades of Grey fans will want a selfie.) Take a city tour. Be sure to try local German Swiss specialties: boiled beef Carpaccio with sautéed veggies or pastry filled with veal in a mushroom, apple cream sauce. Have dinner at Hotel des Balances and consider staying at Hotel Schweizerhof.

**Day 2: Day Trip Pilatus** (German Swiss) Take a day trip from Lucerne to Switzerland's landmark mountain, Mount Pilatus. The Golden Round Trip takes you by boat from Lucerne to



Christmas market in Stein am Rhein in Canton Schaffhausen, Eastern Switzerland. © Swiss Tourism/Christof Sonderegger: Photo courtesy of Switzerland Tourism, NYC.

Alpnachstad where the world's steepest cog railroad will bring you up Pilatus Kulm to experience Switzerland's most dramatic vistas. While there, take an Alpine hike, ride on a zip line you'll never forget and have lunch at an outdoor café. Back in Lucerne, have dinner at Taube.

**Day 3: Lucerne--Montreux** Have dinner at Le Pont de Brent and stay at Hotel Les Trois Couronnes, Vevey.

**Day 4: Montreux – Zermatt** (French Swiss) **Montreux:** Jazz aficionados know Montreux as the home of the famed jazz festival. There's even a statue of Queen's lead singer Freddie Mercury. But even those who aren't music fans will find still love this romantic, artsy resort town on the Swiss Riviera. The wineries here are world renowned, the Chateau de Chillon is an impressive example of a medieval castle and the

views of the Dents-du-Midi are breathtaking. Take a walk from Montreux through the Lavaux Vineyards to the historic Chillon Castle. Walk on the lake promenade, ride the cogwheel train or wander Old Montreux to taste its Edwardian flavor. **Zermatt:** You must take a cog railroad to get to Zermatt, home of the famous Matterhorn, the "Mountain of Mountains," and the ultimate alpine adventure. Everyone should see the Matterhorn at least once in life. Funiculars, gondolas and cable cars will carry you up to panoramic peaks. Take a hike in Zermatt, have dinner at Wymperstube and stay in Zermatt's Hotel Schweizerhof.

**Day 5: Glacier Express to St. Moritz** The Glacier Express is one of the most famous railway trips in the world, running from Zermatt to Davos or St. Moritz in around seven hours. It is a day trip through untouched mountain landscapes, glamorous health resorts, deep gorges, delightful valleys, ninety-one tunnels and across two hundred and ninety one impressive bridges. The famous ski resort of St. Moritz has been luring the royalty and celebrities since 1864. (My guide showed me Sophia Loren's exclusive chair lift.) You will be awed by the Alpine lake, emerald forests and magical snow capped mountains of St. Moritz. If your budget allows, stay at the luxurious five-star Hotel Kulm, overlooking Lake St. Moritz, site of the opening ceremonies of the 1928 and 1948 Winter Olympics.

**Day 6 – "Bernina Express" to "Lugano"** (French & Italian Swiss)

Continued on page 9



Swiss City of Basel © Swiss Tourism / Jan Geert; Photo courtesy of Switzerland Tourism, NYC.



The Basel Carnival – Fife and Drum Music put on by masked bands marching through the Old Town. Photo Christof Sonderegger / © Swiss Tourism; Photo courtesy of Switzerland Tourism, NYC.



Chillon Castle near Montreux on Lake Geneva / Chris Sonderegger Photo © Swiss Tourism; courtesy of Switzerland Tourism, NYC



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*Continued from page 8*

Perfectly positioned on a lake with the Alps at its' back, lucky Lugano has a little bit of everything. Ride a cable car up Monte San Salvatore or Monte Bre for sunny panoramas of the lake, mountains and red-roofed buildings. Explore the town's churches, cathedrals and the expressive and colorful Piazza della Riforma. Sample some slow-cooked Ticinese cuisine and explore the lake during a scenic boat ride. It's a delicious taste of Italy yet still very Swiss.

While on the Bernina Express you will marvel at how within just two and a half hours, the landscapes changes from ice-age glaciers, sweeping vistas of Alpine crossings and dramatic gorges to palm trees. You'll pass over one hundred ninety six timeless bridges and through

fifty-five winding tunnels -- all viewed through the panoramic windows of your train. Stay at the Villa Principe Leopoldo; Ristorante Galleria Arte al Lago offers a great view of the Lake as you dine.

**Day 7 "Lugano" (Italian Swiss)** Have dinner at Arte il and stay in the Villa Principe Leopoldo hotel.

**Day 8 - "Lugano" to "Zurich" (Italian/French/German Swiss)** **Zurich:** Spend your last day in Switzerland by exploring its largest and very bustling International city. Important artworks are displayed in the Kunsthaus and the Rietberg Museum. And if you consider shopping an art, walk along the Bahnhofstrasse and Niederdorf. Go to the Lindt Chocolate Factory: heaven for chocoholics like me. See Chagall's stained glass windows in the Fraumunster, the have dinner at Zunfthaus Zur Waage or Kronehalle

where you can gaze at works by Picasso, Renoir and others while devouring a fabulous meal. (My favorite and expensive, but worth it.) Stay in classic and lovely Baur au Lac hotel.

Switzerland has fabulous, very slightly sparkling wine, though little is ever exported to the U.S. because they only make enough for themselves.

Folks who've made a killing in the market over the last few years may want to consider opening a Swiss Bank Account in Zurich which is sure to impress your friends back home while giving you a great reason to return soon.



*Paddle Steamer Schiller in front of the paddle steamer Gallia.*

*Grand Steamship parades are held regularly on Lake Luzerne. An evening parade takes place every year on August 1st; daytime parades are organized every few years to mark special occasions.*

*© SGV Luzern; Swiss Tourism / Peter RÄ4egger; Photo courtesy of Switzerland Tourism, NYC.*



*Swiss City of Lucerne © Swiss Tourism / Jan Geert; Photo courtesy of Switzerland Tourism, NYC.*



*Bern Tourismus: Winter highlight! A visit to the snowy UNESCO Old Town of Bern. © Swiss Tourism; Photo courtesy of Switzerland Tourism, NYC.*



*Fondue on the terrace of the Berghaus Bort in Grindelwald. In the background the Eiger and the north face of the Eiger. Photo / Stephan Schacher. © Swiss Tourism; Photo courtesy of Switzerland Tourism, NYC*

Be sure to take a couple of scenic Alpine hikes while you are there; you will be entertained by a symphony of "cowbells and rushing waterfalls". Take cable car up the mountain; hike around a bit, then take a cable car back down. Your Hotel Concierge can recommend cable cars that will take you to the easiest trails.

When should you to go to Switzerland? I prefer the summer months when the days are warm and sunny, and the temperatures rarely exceed the mid-70s to low 80s. The ski resorts are fabulous in the summer, even without the snow. However, if you love winter activities, there's no better place in the world for skiing, sledding and snowboarding between December and March.

Besides bringing back the priceless memories of your train tour of

Switzerland, make sure you also bring back some memorable Swiss treasures: Cuckoo clocks for your kids or grandchildren; stop by the famous Lindt Chocolate Factory in Zurich, which would even impress Willy Wonka and stock up on your Swiss chocolates; bring home a Swiss-Goose Down Comforter (like sleeping under a huge cloud); invest in the Swiss watch you've always wanted and visit a Swiss St. Bernard kennel to pick out an adorable pup for your kids: just imagine the look on your kid's faces when your pup arrives. (Warning: Don't consider a St. Bernard unless you have a large home and huge backyard. These "cute pups" grow up fast to weigh about 100 lbs.)

How to get to Switzerland? Don't waste your time searching travel websites for the best airlines and fares, go directly to Swiss.com or call them at 877.359.7947. Swiss has the most non-stop flights, very fair fares and the best part of flying Swiss airlines, is the moment you step aboard the plane, you'll experience your first taste of renowned Swiss hospitality and unequalled in-flight service. Since the Swiss speak three different languages, here's wishing you: Bon voyage, Buon viaggio and Gute Fahrt.

**For more information:** MySwitzerland.com. The staff at the Switzerland Tourism NYC Office graciously supplied the photos for this story and they are available to answer any questions you may have about traveling to their beautiful country. Call them at 212.757.5944 or make an appointment to meet with them at 608 Fifth Ave., NY, NY.



*Skiing in front of the Matterhorn at Zermatt, Canton Valais. Photo © Swiss Tourism / Chris Sonderegger. Photo courtesy of Swiss Tourism, NY*