

# Bernese Oberland



It's impossible to do the Bernese Oberland justice on paper. German poet Goethe and English romantic Lord Byron both eulogised its waterfalls and glaciers. Mark Twain wrote that no opiate compared to walking through it. Yet even these great talents failed to capture the majesty of a place that has to be seen to be believed.

No amount of hyperbole about sparkling vistas where snow-capped peaks line up like bowling pins – or talk of sheer valleys, verdant pastures and crystal-clear lakes (blah, blah, blah) – could ever communicate the sheer outrageous beauty of Switzerland's Alpine heartland. So don't take anyone else's word for it, just visit.

The 'big three' peaks of the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau lie at the region's heart and the most talked-about trip is the train ride to Europe's highest station at Jungfraujoch. However, everyone finds their favourite spot, whether in the breathtakingly serene Lauterbrunnen valley, on the ridges above Grindelwald or in some remote area around Kandersteg.

Cable cars thread up mountain slopes to incomparable outlooks and lake steamers glide past waterfront castles, so you're not required to exert much energy. But even confirmed city types usually find themselves inspired to hit the hiking trails that crisscross the landscape.

Thrill-seekers rush to jump off the mountains around Interlaken, while families head to Balenbergl to see gentle Swiss traditions re-enacted. All sorts, it seems – from Sherlock Holmes fans around Meiringen to jetsetters in Gstaad – get a kick out of this incomparable region.

And if words can't convey how good the Bernese Oberland looks, professional photographers seem at a loss too. Listen to the postcard carousels creak in souvenir shops, as customers push them round in circles in search of something that lives up to their memories.

## HIGHLIGHTS

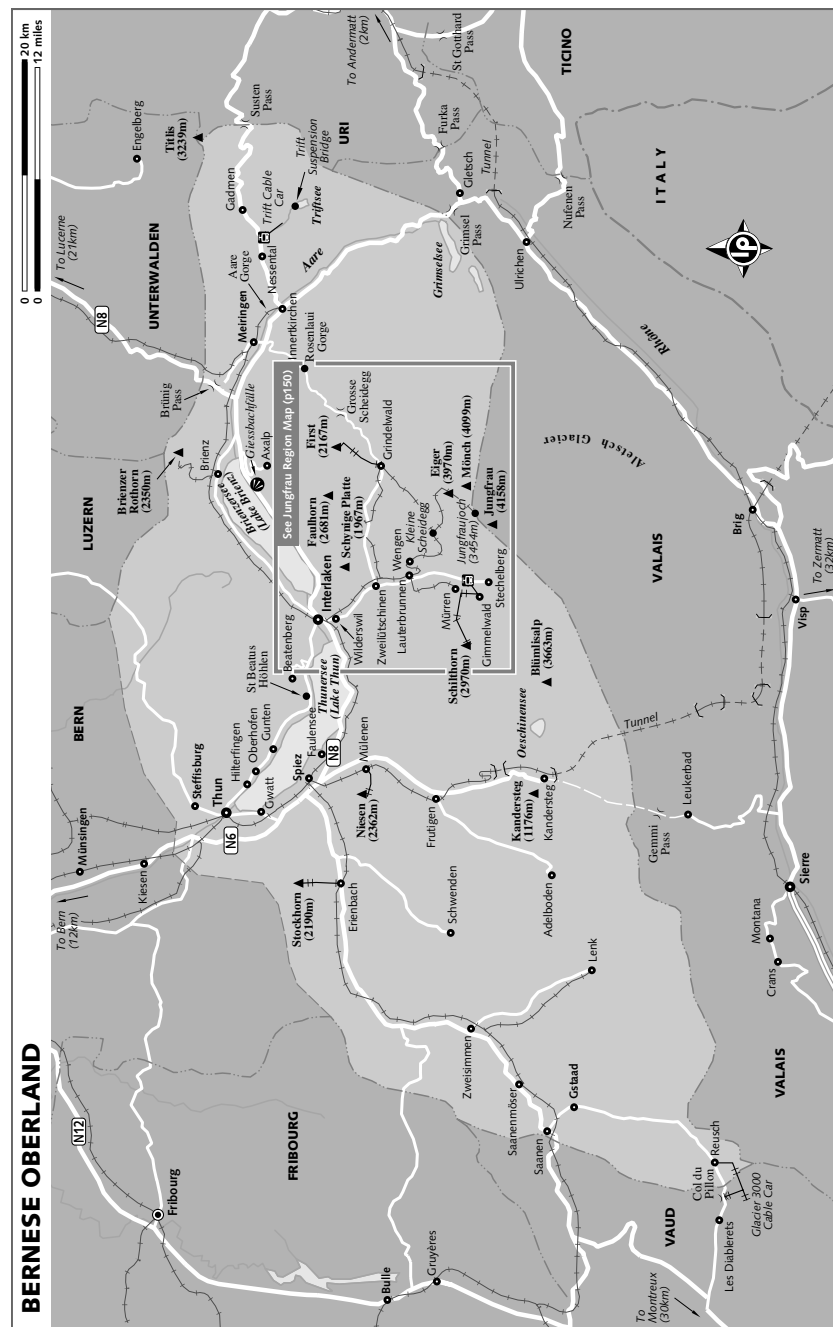
- Enjoy the heavenly **hike** (p149) between Schynige Platte and Grindelwald-First
- Float up to the scenic car-free resorts of **Mürren** (p165) and **Gimmelwald** (p166)
- Hit the heights of **Schilthorn** (p166) or **Jungfraujoch** (p155)
- Paraglide from the peaks above **Interlaken** (p146) or **Grindelwald** (p152)
- Get up close and personal with the magnificent **Trift Glacier** (p172)



■ POPULATION: 897,502

■ AREA: 5907 SQ KM

■ LANGUAGE: GERMAN





## Sights & Activities

As a regional gateway, Interlaken itself possesses few attractions. However, its biggest and newest is **Mystery Park** (☎ 0848 50 60 70; www.mysterypark.ch; adult/child/student Sfr48/28/38, late entry after 3.30pm Sfr28; ☎ 10am-6pm). This otherworldly theme park looms large on the outskirts, with expensive re-creations of a Mayan temple, Egyptian pyramid, Indian Vimana, Stonehenge and a highly visible 'Sphere'. It's the brainchild of Erich von Däniken, the Swiss author of the 1970s bestseller *Chariots of the Gods*, and its displays (including crop circles in summer) are meant to get you thinking about aliens. Sceptics need not apply. There's a free shuttle bus from Interlaken Ost once or twice an hour.

For an altogether more nostalgic atmosphere, head across the Aare River to Interlaken's charming old quarter of **Unterseen**. Near the 1471 Amthaus, there's a humble **Tourist Museum** (☎ 033 822 98 39; Obere Gasse 26; adult/child Sfr5/3; ☎ 2-5pm Tue-Sun May-Oct), which details how the surrounding areas opened up in the 19th century.

Two funicular trips into the surrounding hills are worth making. A **nostalgic funicular** (adult/child return Sfr10/7) will take you up to family-friendly **Heimwehfluh** (☎ 033 822 34 53; www.heimwehfluh.ch; adult/child Sfr6/5, bobsled run Sfr5; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Apr-Oct), where there's a wonderful view, a model-train display and a toboggan ride all the way back down the hill.

Alternatively, **Harder Kulm** (☎ 033 822 34 44; www.harderkulm.ch in German; single/return Sfr14.60/Sfr24; ☎ Apr-Oct) has a panoramic restaurant and many hiking paths.

## EXTREME SPORTS

Switzerland is the world's second-biggest adventure-sports destination, just behind New Zealand, and Interlaken is its busiest hub. Everything you can think of in this regard is offered from here (although the activities take place in the greater Jungfrau Region). There's river rafting on the Lüttschine, Simme and Saane Rivers, canyoning in the Saxetet, Grimsel or Chli Schliere gorges, and canyon-jumping at the Gletscherschlucht near Grindelwald (see p152). In addition, you can paragliding off any number of mountains, bungee jumping, skydiving, ice-climbing, hydro-speeding and much more.

The major operators, each able to arrange most sports, include the following:

**Alpin Center** (☎ 033 823 55 23; www.alpincenter.ch; Hauptstrasse 16)

**Alpinraft** (☎ 033 823 41 00; www.alpinraft.ch; Hauptstrasse 7)

**Outdoor Interlaken** (☎ 033 826 77 19; www.outdoor-interlaken.ch; Hauptstrasse 15)

**Swissraft** (☎ 033 823 02 10; www.swissraft.ch; Obere Jungfraustrasse 72)

**Bohag** (☎ 033 822 90 00; www.bohag.ch in German; Gsteigwiller bei Interlaken) and **Scenic Air** (☎ 033 826 77 17; www.scenicair.ch, www.skydiveswitzerland.com) conducts scenic flights, skydiving and other activities.

Prices are from Sfr90 for rock climbing, Sfr95 for rafting, Sfr125 for bungee jumping, Sfr110 for canyoning, Sfr120 for hydro-speeding, Sfr140 for paragliding and Sfr380 for skydiving.

The vast majority of excursions are without incident, but there's always a small risk of injury. Two tragically fatal accidents – canyoning in the Saxetet Gorge and bungee jumping off the Stechelberg-Mürren cable car – about five years ago fortunately have not been repeated, but it's always a good idea to ask about safety records and procedures.

## Sleeping

Ask your hotel for the useful Guest Card, which offers discounts on local sporting facilities and free bus transport across town, and call ahead during the low season, as some places close.

## BUDGET Hostels

**Balmer's Herberge** (☎ 033 822 19 61; www.balmers.ch; Hauptstrasse 23; dm Sfr24-27, d Sfr60-70; ☎ year-round; ☑) Switzerland's oldest private hostel is a legend, known for its fun, frat-house atmosphere. This *Animal House* buzzes with the adrenalin of those coming down from adventure sports and there's always something social happening. In summer, Balmer's also opens a huge tent along Gsteigstrasse, about 800m south.

**Backpackers Villa Sonnenhof** (☎ 033 826 71 71; www.villa.ch; Alpenstrasse 16; dm/d Sfr33/98; r with Jungfrau view per person extra Sfr5; ☎ reception 7.30-11am & 4-9pm, to 10pm summer; ☑) Widely regarded as the cleanest and most genteel of Interlaken's hostels, this place still has plenty going on. There's a small kitchen, a lounge and table tennis in the garden. The old

steamer trunks and balconies with views of the Jungfrau are nice touches, too.

**Funny Farm** (☎ 079 652 61 27; www.funny-farm.ch; Hauptstrasse; dm without sheets Sfr25, dm with shower & toilet Sfr35; ☑) Funny Farm is halfway between a squat and an island shipwreck. There's a ramshackle house surrounded by makeshift bars and a swimming pool, but guests don't care; they're here for the party and revel in such anarchism.

Also available are these places:

**Happy Inn Lodge** (☎ 033 822 32 25; www.happy-inn.com; Rosenstrasse 17; dm Sfr22, s/d/tr Sfr38/76/96, breakfast extra Sfr8) OK hostel, recently spruced up a little, with cheap prices, central location and noisy bar.

**SVHA hostel** (☎ 033 822 43 53; www.youthhostel.ch/boenigen; Aareweg 21, am See, Bönigen; dm/d Sfr30/86; ☎ reception 7-10am & 4-10pm to 11.30pm summer, hostel closed mid-Nov–late-Jan, except Christmas/New Year) Quite a way from town with a scenic garden on the waterfront. Take bus No 1.

## Hotels & Pensions

**Hotel Lötschberg/Susi's B & B** (☎ 033 822 25 45; www.lotschberg.ch; General Guisan Strasse 31; B&B s/d Sfr95/125, hotel s/d from Sfr115/155; ☎ P) The individually decorated rooms at this place are thoughtfully designed and charming, almost as if you're staying in a private home. They do tend to be quite small, though, particularly in the attached B&B.

## Camping

**Sackgut/River Lodge** (☎ 033 822 44 34; Brienzstrasse; camp sites per adult/car Sfr9.50/4, tent Sfr7.50/17.50, tent

bungalow for 4 people Sfr98; ☎ May–mid-Oct) Sackgut's the only camp site actually in the town, and now has a row of bungalows along the waterfront, which it offers under the River Lodge banner.

## MIDRANGE

**Hotel-Gasthof Hirschen** (☎ 033 822 15 45; www.hirsch-en-interlaken.ch in German; Hauptstrasse 11; s/d from Sfr90/180) Under new management and having undergone a Sfr400,000 renovation in 2004, this 16th-century heritage-listed Swiss chalet is enjoying a new lease of life. Rooms are now 'rustic modern', with parquet floors, bathroom pods and wireless LAN. The in-house Swiss restaurant (mains Sfr15 to Sfr40, open Wednesday to Monday) has also been refurbished.

**Hotel Alphorn** (☎ 033 822 30 51; www.hotel-alphorn.ch; Rugenastrasse 8; s/d Sfr120/140) Tucked away in a quiet street, allowing it to offer ample parking. It also belongs to a very small group of hotels and hires out Smart cars to guests as part of its accommodation package. Renovated rooms in the adjoining Hotel Eiger are Sfr20 more per person.

**Hotel Splendid** (☎ 033 822 76 12; Höhweg 33; s/d Sfr90/120, s/d with shower & toilet Sfr135/210) This friendly hotel is on a central corner, but you hear surprisingly little noise from the rooms. These come in a range of decorative styles, from Swiss traditional to something approaching modern.

**Hotel City** (☎ 033 822 10 22; www.city-hotel.ch; Am Marktplatz; standard s/d Sfr110/150, superior s/d Sfr140/210) There's lots of classic Scandinavian décor here, from stylish padded armchairs, geometric lampshades, sauna-style wood panelling and a cylindrical fireplace. But if you don't get a kick out of that retro vibe, go for one of the renovated or more contemporary rooms.

**Hôtel du Lac** (☎ 033 822 29 22; www.dulac-interlaken.ch; Höhweg 225; s/d Sfr150/270) In a great spot overlooking the river near Interlaken Ost train station, this hotel has been in the same family for generations, and although it has a slight mish-mash of styles it retains more than enough of its former belle époque glory to remain immensely charming.

**Metropole Hotel** (☎ 033 828 66 66; www.metropole-interlaken.ch in German; Höhweg 37; s/d Sfr195/295, breakfast Sfr25) As the tallest concrete high-rise on Interlaken's horizon, this is impossible to miss. However, with an exterior this

## AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Hotel Rugenpark** (☎ 033 822 36 61; www.rugenpark.ch; Rugenparkstrasse 19; s/d/tr/f Sfr85/130/165/200, without bathroom Sfr65/105/140/175; ☑ ☎ P) Its newish owners, Chris and Ursula, have already done wonders in transforming this into an incredibly sweet B&B. Rooms remain humble, but the place is spotless and public areas have been enlivened with colourful cushions, beads and travel trinkets. There's a hammock and child's swing in the large garden, where Monty the dog likes to roam, while a large breakfast buffet is served and some rooms have Jungfrau views. Most of all, you feel at home and your knowledgeable hosts are always ready to help with local tips.

ugly, staying here is a boon: while you enjoy lofty views of the town and Jungfrau, you're also saved from looking at the Metropole.

**Hotel Royal St Georges** (☎ 033 822 75 75; www.royal-stgeorges.ch; Höheweg 139; s/d Sfr175/280) Down the road is this lovingly restored Art Nouveau gem. It has a slightly stuffy air about it, but it's still quite delightful.

#### TOP END

**Victoria-Jungfrau Grand Hotel & Spa** (☎ 033 828 28 28; www.victoria-jungfrau.ch; Höheweg 41; s/d from Sfr560/680, d with Jungfrau views from Sfr780; 📺 📞 📧 📱) The reverent hush and impeccable service here (as well as the prices) hark back to the era when only royalty and the seriously wealthy travelled. A perfect melding of well-preserved Victorian-era features and modern luxury help make this Interlaken's answer to Raffles – with plum views of the Jungfrau to boot.

#### Eating

**Welcome India** (☎ 033 822 52 04; Rosenstrasse 7; mains Sfr11-32, weekday lunch menus Sfr14.50-16.50; 🍽️ lunch & dinner Dec-Oct, dinner Nov) Decorated like a true curry house with carved wooden statues and a garish mixture of black, orange and yellow, this is the best of several local Indian restaurants. The menu includes Punjabi and northern Indian specialities.

**Pizzeria Horn** (☎ 033 822 92 92; Hardererstrasse 35; pizzas Sfr13-20, other mains Sfr20-35; 🍽️ dinner Thu-Mon) This quirky old-fashioned restaurant looks like it's been the same for decades, with pink tablecloths covering wooden tables, dried tobacco sheaths hanging from the ceiling and four romantic alcoves. But why should it change? The atmosphere is wonderfully warm and familiar, while the tasty pizzas emerging from the central wood-fired oven are the real deal.

**West End** (☎ 033 822 17 14; Rugenparkstrasse 2; mains Sfr15-36; 🍽️ dinner Mon-Sat) Amuse yourselves with the wine list and remember that good things come to those who wait, as you survey the incongruous Swiss interior of this buzzing, congenial Italian restaurant. Many of the pasta and other dishes are freshly homemade and can take a while to arrive at your table, but when they do, they're usually delicious.

**Belvédère Brasserie** (☎ 033 828 91 00; Höheweg 95; mains Sfr18-36; 🍽️ lunch & dinner) Although attached to the boring-look Hapimag hotel village, this brasserie has upbeat contemporary décor, with excellent international cuisine such as

monkfish medallions in saffron sauce and veal in merlot sauce, alongside a handful of Swiss stalwarts. It's closed on Tuesdays from December to May and for all of November.

**Goldener Anker** (☎ 033 822 16 72; www.anker.ch in German; Marktgasse 57; mains Sfr18-38; 🍽️ 4-11.30pm daily, from 10am Sat & Sun) Its interior rebuilt after the 2005 floods, this well-respected establishment continues to serve interesting dishes, ranging from chicken fajitas and red snapper to ostrich steaks. It also has a roster of live bands and international artists.

**Steinbock** (☎ 033 822 18 43; Kreuzgasse 5; mains Sfr15-35; 🍽️ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) While there are dozens of phoney and/or overpriced Swiss restaurants lining Höheweg, this humble tavern is one in which locals also eat. Another good option for Swiss food is the Hirschen (see p147).

For coffee and cake, or a cocktail, try **Top o' Met** (☎ 033 828 66 66; Höheweg 37) on the top floor of the Metropole Hotel, which has excellent views. **Schuh** (☎ 033 822 94 41; Höheweg 56; 🍽️ 8am-10.30pm, to 9pm in winter) also works as a Viennese-style coffee house. Skip dinner here, however, as the tinkling, Barry Manilow-style piano and overwhelmingly pink interior can feel like being trapped in a 1970s B-movie.

Good cheap eats include **Tamil Asian Shop & Takeaway** (☎ 033 822 23 30; Uniongasse 1; all menus Sfr10.90; 🍽️ 10.30am-10.30pm) and **My Little Thai** (☎ 033 822 01 75; Hauptstrasse 19; mains Sfr12.50-20.50; 🍽️ 10.30am-12.30am) next to Balmer's.

There's a supermarket opposite each train station and another, **Coop Pronto** (Höheweg 11; 🍽️ 10-10pm Mon-Sat), in between them.

#### Drinking

**Positiv Einfach** (Centralstrasse) This cosy little DJ bar place feels more local and dignified, with its slick, low-lit interior.

**Per Bacco** (☎ 033 822 97 92; Rugenparkstrasse 2; 🍽️ 9-1am Mon-Sat) This is a fairly chi-chi wine bar, attracting a slightly more sophisticated and well-dressed older crowd.

The bars at Balmer's, Funny Farm and Happy Inn Lodge are usually the most lively drinking holes for 20-something travellers, although you'll also find older locals in the Happy Inn.

#### Entertainment

There are twice-weekly performances of Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* between late June

#### ROCKY HORROR

The rivalries between Switzerland's linguistic communities are usually low-key, but when they do erupt it's often over the most unlikely things. Take the German-speaking canton of Bern and French-speaking Jura separatists as an example. They've been tussling over a 65kg piece of rock for more than 20 years.

The 200-year-old Unspunnen Stone (*Unspunnenstein*) is a focal point of Switzerland's Alpine Games, which since 1805 have symbolically asserted national unity and are now held about once every 10 years. The stone was first kidnapped from an Interlaken museum in 1984 by the French-speaking 'Beliers', who lay claim to part of Bern's territory. They kept it hostage for 17 years, while also demanding Jura's devolution from Switzerland and entry into the European Union.

In 2001, the stone was suddenly given back in mysterious circumstances, and engraved with the EU flag. Just four years later there was another theft, again from Interlaken, where the travelling games were due to be held that year.

The **Alpine games** (Unspunnenfest; ☎ 033 826 53 53; www.unspunnenfest.ch) feature yodelling, Al-phorn playing, *Schwingen* wrestling and stone-throwing, preferably of the historic Unspunnen Stone. With floods swiftly following the theft, the 2005 Interlaken games were postponed until September 2006. At the time of writing, the stone still hadn't reappeared.

and mid-September, staged in the open-air theatre in the Rugen Forest. The play is in German but an English synopsis is available. Tickets are available from **Tellspielbüro** (☎ 033 822 37 22; www.tellspele.ch; Höheweg 37; tickets Sfr26-48) in the tourist office, and from some hotels.

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Trains to Lucerne (Sfr29) depart hourly from Interlaken Ost train station. Trains to Brig (via Spiez and Lötschberg) and to Montreux (via Bern or Zweisimmen) depart from Interlaken West or Ost.

Main roads head east to Lucerne and west to Bern, but the only way south for vehicles without a big detour round the mountains is to take the car-carrying train from Kandersteg, south of Spiez.

Should you wish to hire a car in Interlaken for trips further into Switzerland, big-name rental companies **Avis** (☎ 033 822 19 39; Waldegstrasse 34a), near a 24-hour petrol station, and **Hertz** (☎ 033 822 61 72; Harderstrasse 25), are both reasonably central.

#### GETTING AROUND

You can easily get around Interlaken on foot, but taxis and buses are found at each train station. Alternatively, you can pick up scooters, motorbikes and small cars for zipping around town at **Daniel's** (☎ 033 822 01 75; www.daniels-rental.ch; Hauptstrasse 19), among others.

## AROUND INTERLAKEN

### SCHYNI GE PLATTE

One of the most memorable day trips from Interlaken is to this 1967m plateau. There's an **Alpine garden** (admission Sfr4) with 500 types of flora, including Edelweiss. There's also a collection of thousands of toy bears at **Teddyland** (admission free).

Despite all this, the main attraction is the hiking and the views. The **Panoramaweg** is an easy two-hour circuit, while the trail to **Grindelwald-First** is one of the best in the region. If you're here in July or August, don't miss the **moonlight hikes** here.

You reach the plateau on a **cog-wheel train** (www.schynigeplatte.ch, www.jungfraubahn.ch; one way/return Sfr33/54; 🍽️ closed late Oct-late May) from Wilderswil, a short train ride from Interlaken Ost. If you don't have your own boots with you, there is, amazingly, free boot-testing on Schynige Platte (see the websites for details).

### ST BEATUS HÖHLEN

A bus ride from Interlaken, a 1½-hour walk or a short Sfr7 boat ride, you'll find the attractive **St Beatus Caves** (☎ 033 841 16 43; adult/child/student Sfr17/9/15; 🍽️ 10.30am-5pm Apr-mid-Oct). They're supposed to have sheltered St Beatus in the 6th century, but it's their stalagmites, stalactites and underground lakes that make them interesting.

The accompanying museum can easily be missed.

## JUNGFRAU REGION

If the Bernese Oberland is Switzerland's Alpine heartland, the Jungfrau Region within it is the holiest of the holy. Dominated by the famous Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau (Ogre, Monk and Virgin) mountains, it boasts the country's highest density of dramatic scenery. In every direction you turn – whether on a hike from Grindelwald Männlichen, in a cable car to Schilthorn, or a hotel room in Mürren – you're faced with outstanding natural beauty. With hundreds of kilometres of walking trails in the region, you're able to observe the landscape from many angles, but it never looks less than astonishing.

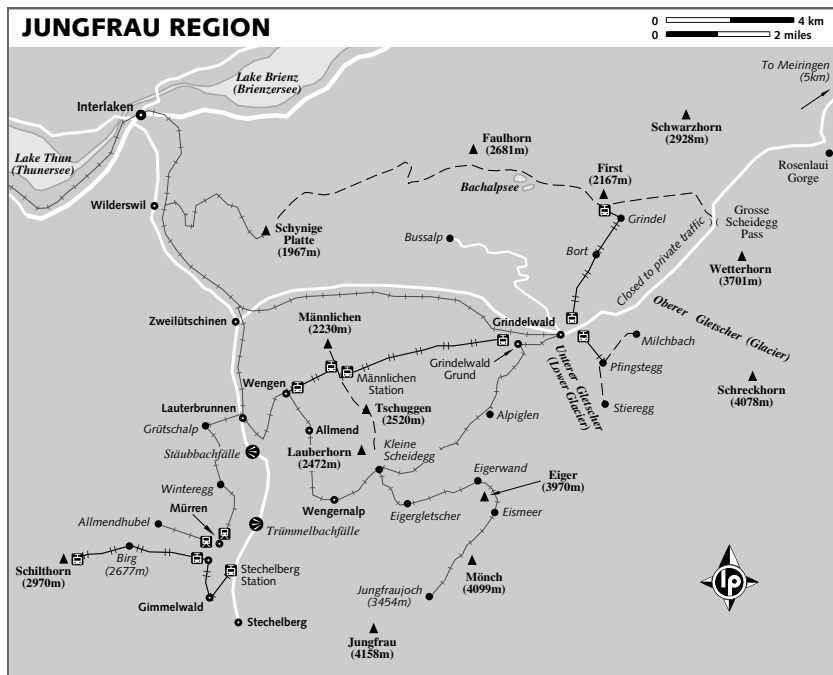
The 'big three' peaks have an enduring place in mountaineering legend, particularly the 3970m Eiger, whose fearsome north wall claimed many lives and remained unconquered until 1938. Reaching

great heights is easier today; it takes just hours to whiz up by train to Jungfrauoch (3454m), the highest station in Europe.

### Orientation & Information

Two valleys branch southwards from Interlaken. The broad valley curving to the east is dominated by Grindelwald. The valley running more directly south leads to Lauterbrunnen, from where you can reach several car-free resorts on the hills above – Wengen on the eastern ridge, Mürren and Gimmelwald on the west. These latter two villages are reached either via mountainside Grütschalp or via Stechelberg farther along the Lauterbrunnen Valley floor.

Between the two valleys stands the holy grail of Jungfrauoch, Europe's highest train station. It's usual to travel in a loop, say, from Interlaken to Grindelwald, to Kleine Scheidegg at the bottom of the Eiger, to Jungfrauoch, back to Kleine Scheidegg and on to Wengen, Lauterbrunnen and Interlaken. However, the trip can also be taken in the opposite, anticlockwise direction, or you can retrace your steps.



Schilthorn, the region's other main look-out point, is reached via Mürren.

Mountain-top journeys are only really worth making on clear days. Conditions are volatile in the mountains, and the outlook changes frequently, but it's always a good idea to check a webcam before you leave. A good selection is found at [www.jungfrau.bahn.ch](http://www.jungfrau.bahn.ch), although tourist office websites and [www.swisspanorama.com](http://www.swisspanorama.com) are also very helpful.

Staying in resorts entitles you to a Gästecarte (Guest Card), good for discounts throughout the entire region. Ask your hotel for the card if one isn't forthcoming.

### Getting There & Around

Hourly trains depart for the region from Interlaken Ost station. Sit in the front half of the train for Lauterbrunnen or the back half for Grindelwald. The two sections of the train split up where the two valleys diverge at Zweilütschinen. The rail tracks loop around and meet up again at Kleine Scheidegg at the base of the Eiger, from where the route goes up and back to Jungfrauoch.

Swiss Passes are valid as far as Grindelwald in one direction and Wengen and Mürren in the other; beyond that, holders get a 25% discount. Eurail and Inter Rail Passes are not valid beyond Interlaken, although they are good for a 25% discount on Jungfrau journeys. The Swiss Half-Fare Card is valid within the entire region.

**Jungfraubahnen** (Jungfrau Railways; ☎ 033 828 72 33; [www.jungfraubahn.ch](http://www.jungfraubahn.ch)) offers its own pass, providing five days of unlimited travel throughout the region for Sfr165 (Sfr120 with Swiss Pass, Swiss Card or Half-Fare Card), though you still have to pay half-price from Eigergletscher (just past Kleine Scheidegg) to Jungfrauoch.

Sample fares include the following: Interlaken Ost to Grindelwald Sfr9.80; Grindelwald to Kleine Scheidegg Sfr30; Kleine Scheidegg to Jungfrauoch Sfr104 (return); Kleine Scheidegg to Wengen Sfr23; Wengen to Lauterbrunnen Sfr6; and Lauterbrunnen to Interlaken Ost Sfr6.60. Check out the website for a complete and up-to-date list.

Many of the cable cars close for servicing at the end of April and at the end of November.

## GRINDELWALD

pop 4166 / elevation 1090m

Below the imposing Eiger mountain, Grindelwald's lengthy main thoroughfare threads along the floor of a picturesque valley. Nicknamed the 'glacier village', for its proximity to two large seas of ice, Grindelwald is a bustling winter ski resort and year-round hiking mecca.

### Orientation & Information

The centre is east of the train station. At either end of the village, Terrassenweg loops north off the main street and takes a scenic, elevated east-west course. Below and south of the main street is the Schwarze Lütschine river.

Postal buses and local buses depart from near the train station, and a post office is nearby. Local buses are free with the Guest Card in winter.

The **tourist office** (☎ 033 854 12 12; [www.grindelwald.com](http://www.grindelwald.com); Dorfstrasse; ☹ 8am-noon & 1.30-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon & 1.30-5pm Sat, 9am-noon & 1.30-5pm Sun summer & winter high season, 8am-noon & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat low season) is in the Sportzentrum.

### Sights & Activities

The **Oberer Gletscher** (Upper Glacier) is renowned for its blue hues. It's a 1½-hour hike east from the village, or catch a local bus (marked Terrassen Weg-Oberer Gletscher, Sfr6.80 one way) to the Hotel-Restaurant Wetterhorn. Fifteen minutes from the bus stop, then (pant!) up 890 log stairs, after you pay your entrance fee (adult/child Sfr6/3), you'll find a terrace offering wonderful views.

**Gletscherschlucht** (Glacier Gorge; admission Sfr6; ☹ 10am-5pm May-Oct, to 6pm Jul & Aug) is a 35-minute walk south of the village centre, past Gletscherdorf (see p153) camping ground. This is a popular spot for canyon-jumping expeditions. At the end of the 1000m gorge, you can also spy the tongue of the **Unterer Gletscher** (Lower Glacier).

### HIKING

The best hiking in Grindelwald is above the village – around Männlichen, First and Pfingstegg – reached by taking the relevant cable car up from the village. Some of these areas can just as easily be approached from Wengen or Schynige Platte, so see p154 for details.

## WINTER SPORTS

The region of First (see p154) offers many **ski** runs stretching from Oberjoch at 2486m right down to the village at 1050m. Most are intermediate or difficult. From Kleine Scheidegg or Männlichen there are long, easy runs back to Grindelwald. Grindelwald is also a good base for **cross-country skiing** (33km of trails).

Grindelwald Sports includes the skiing school.

## OTHER ACTIVITIES

In the tourist office, **Grindelwald Sports** (☎ 033 854 12 90; www.grindelwaldsports.ch in German) organises mountain climbing, canyon-jumping and glacier bungee jumping. **Paragliding Grindelwald** (☎ 079 779 90 00; www.paragliding-grindelwald.ch) organises simple jumps from 1200m at First (from Sfr160) and hikes to and jumps from Schreckhornhütte (Sfr490), with many options in between.

## Festivals & Events

The **World Snow Festival**, where competitive international teams create enormous ice

sculptures, is in mid-January. In July there's **Schwigen** (Swiss, Sumo-style wrestling) at nearby Grosse Scheidegg, while the **Eiger Bike Challenge**, over a 90km course through the valley and surrounding mountains, races by in August.

## Sleeping

If you're looking for a holiday chalet instead of a hotel, the tourist office has a full list.

## HOSTELS

These first two hostels are reached by buses to Bussalp, Terrassenweg and Waldspitz. Services run at least hourly between 9am and 5pm, with a gap at lunchtime. The 30-minute uphill walk sets off from the road that follows the rail tracks on the northern side. Don't miss the small sign on the brown-and-white house indicating the steep footpath up to the right.

**SYHA hostel** (☎ 033 853 10 09; www.youthhostel.ch/grindelwald; Terrassenweg; 4-/6-person dm from Sfr31/35, d with/without bathroom Sfr76/102; ☎ reception & check in from 3.30pm Mon-Sat, from 5pm Sun, hostel closed btwn seasons) Perched high on a ridge, with spec-

tacular views, this excellent hostel is spread across a cosy wooden chalet (with six-bed dorms) and a modern annexe (with four-bed dorms). Take the bus to Gaggi-Säge.

**Naturfreundehaus** (☎ 033 853 13 33; www.naturfreundehaus.ch; Terrassenweg; dm Sfr34-39; ☎ closed low season) Decorated in a simple, traditional Swiss fashion, this also has a great back garden with a wonderful valley outlook. Take the bus to the Naturfreundehaus stop.

**Downtown Lodge** (☎ 033 853 08 25; www.downtown-lodge.ch; dm without breakfast Sfr35-40; ☎) Grindelwald's most conveniently located hostel is modern, clean and friendly. However, the surrounds are not as atmospheric as at the SYHA.

**Mountain Hostel** (☎ 033 853 39 00; www.mountainhostel.ch; dm/d with shared bathroom from Sfr34/88) Near the Männlichen cable-car station, this big, blue, modern complex is a good base for sports junkies.

## CAMPING

**Gletschergarten** (☎ 033 853 14 29; www.gletschergarten.ch; adult Sfr9.20, plus camp site Sfr6-17; ☎ for tents May-late Oct, for caravans year-round) Near the Pflingstegg cable car, this is the most convenient and well equipped of several camping sites, with views of the Eiger. A supplement is payable for very short stays.

## HOTELS & PENSIONS

**Gletschergarten** (☎ 033 853 17 21; www.hotel-gletschergarten.ch; s/d from Sfr120/220; ☎ (P)) Quaint and charming without being cloying, Gletschergarten's appealing rusticity is complemented by all mod cons, including a lift, hairdryers and in-room safes. Every room has a balcony.

**Fiescherblick** (☎ 033 854 53 53; www.fiescherblick.ch; s/d from Sfr105/170) Another excellent hotel in the same mode as the neighbouring Gletschergarten.

**Residence** (☎ 033 854 55 55; www.residence-grindelwald.ch in German; s/d from Sfr90/150; ☎ (P)) Seated in a quiet location on the eastern side of the village, this is friendly, cosy and modern. There's a terrace restaurant overlooking the Wetterhorn. It's closed in November.

**Bodmi** (☎ 033 854 18 18; www.bodmi.ch; s/d from Sfr185/265; ☎ (P)) Also in a quiet location, further along from the youth hostel and under the First cable car, this elegant family-run hotel offers well-furnished, generously sized rooms with good views, and has a good

restaurant. Call ahead and they'll collect you from the train station. Terrassenweg buses stop outside, too.

**Belvedere** (☎ 033 854 57 57; www.belvedere-grindelwald.ch; s/d from Sfr255/350, ste from Sfr490; ☎ (P) ☎) This nine-storey, four-star hotel enjoys some of the best views in the village and its rooms are special too. The suites, in particular, mix old and new, with wood-beamed ceilings, bed niches and all mod cons. Public rooms include a lounge in Louis Philippe style.

## Eating

**Onkel Tom's Hütte** (☎ 033 853 52 39; Im Graben 4; pizzas from Sfr13-30; ☎ 4-10.30pm Tue, noon-2pm & 4pm-midnight Wed-Sun) Usually, the biggest problem in this sweet mini-chalet is getting a table. It serves good pizzas, in three sizes to suit any appetite.

**Memory** (☎ 033 854 31 31; mains Sfr15-25; Dorfstrasse; ☎ 11.30am-10.30pm) The most casual eatery in the Eiger Hotel is an unpretentious choice for steaks, sandwiches, jacket potatoes and burgers. It also does tasty rösti and fondue.

**C & M** (Café und Mehr; ☎ 033 853 07 10; mains Sfr7.50-38; ☎ 8.30am-11.30pm Wed-Mon) There's a stupendous view from this café's rear terrace, where you can enjoy an ice cream, coffee and cake or a beer. The place also does some fantastic modern international/seasonal cuisine, with the daily changing menu including things like perch on mashed pumpkin with risotto and entrecôte of venison.

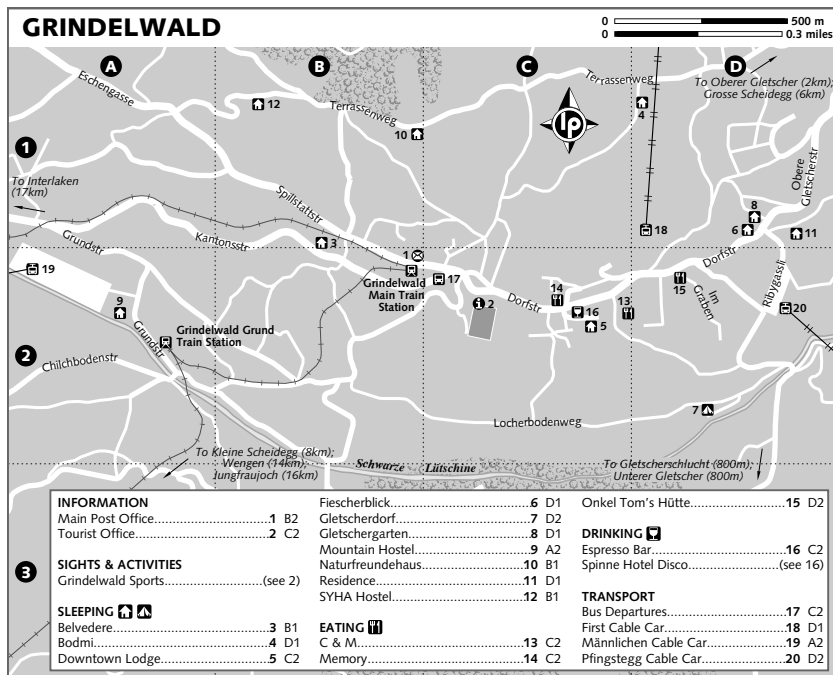
**Fiescherblick** (☎ 033 854 53 53; mains Sfr25-45, menus Sfr28-75; ☎ 6pm-late; ☎ closed after Easter, mid-Oct-mid-Dec) This hotel has a small bistro, but its main attraction is its GaultMillau-rated gourmet restaurant, with a range of Swiss and international cuisine.

## Drinking

The misleadingly named **Espresso Bar** (☎ 033 954 88 88), in the Spinne Hotel, is a popular watering hole. The hotel also has a **disco** (admission free; ☎ Mon-Sat winter, Thu-Sat summer) with a DJ and occasional live music.

## Getting There & Away

See p151 for train fares. Grindelwald can also be reached by the main road from Interlaken. A smaller road continues from the village over the Grosse Scheidegg Pass (1960m). It's closed to private traffic, but from early July to early October postal buses (two hours) travel this scenic route to Meiringen (see p174).



### SKIING THE JUNGFRAU REGION

Grindelwald, Männlichen, Mürren and Wengen are all popular skiing destinations, plus there's a demanding run down from the Schilthorn. In all, there are 205km of prepared runs and 45 ski lifts. A one-day ski pass for either Grindelwald-Wengen or Mürren-Schilthorn costs Sfr56 (Sfr28 for children, Sfr45 for 16 to 19 year olds, Sfr50 for those over 62). Ski passes for the whole Jungfrau ski region cost Sfr120/60/96/108 for a minimum two days, but switching between ski areas by train can be slow and crowded. In 2006, as part of new measures to heighten skiers' awareness of safety issues, a speed limit of 30km/h was introduced on certain runs above Grindelwald.

### AROUND GRINDELWALD Männlichen

On the ridge dividing the Grindelwald and Lauterbrunnen valleys, Männlichen (2230m) is one of the region's top look-out points. The world's longest **cable car** (☎ 033 854 80 80; www.maennlichenbahn.ch) route connects Grindelwald-Grund to Männlichen (Sfr30/Sfr50 one way/return, Sfr30 return 3pm to 5pm in summer). Another cable car comes up the other side of the ridge, from Wengen (Sfr23/Sfr38 one way/return).

From the top Männlichen station, walk 10 minutes up to the crown of the hill to enjoy the view. At the southern end of the ridge are Tschuggen (2520m) and Lauberhorn (2472m), with the 'big three' looming behind. From here, you notice the difference between the two valleys – the broad expanse of the Grindelwald Valley to the left, and the glacier-formed Lauterbrunnen Valley to the right with its steep sides. To the north you can see a stretch of Thunersee.

If you wish to stay overnight, there's the **Berggasthaus Männlichen** (☎ 033 853 10 68; berggasthaus@maennlichen.ch) or an **igloo camp** (www.maennlichenbahn.ch) in winter.

A classic hike from Männlichen is the scenic **Panoramaweg** down to Kleine Scheidegg, which heads south to Honegg, and skirts around the Lauberhorn ridge to reach Rotstöckli and Kleine Scheidegg in 1½ hours.

### First

A cable car goes to **First** (☎ 033 828 77 11; www.go.first.ch; one way/return Sfr30/50), where there are 100km of paths, half of which stay open in winter. From here, you can hike up to **Faulhorn** (2681m; 2½ hours) via Bachalpsee (Lake Bachalp). As you proceed along the ridge to Bachalpsee, there are excellent unfolding panoramas of the Jungfrau massif; at Faulhorn, there's a restaurant and a 360° panorama. From here, you can choose to continue on to Schynige Platte (another three hours), and return by train. Or you can hike to Bussalp (1800m, 1½ hours) and return by bus to Grindelwald (Sfr19.80).

Other hikes go to Schwarzhorn (three hours), Grosse Scheidegg (1½ hours), Unterer Gletscher (1½ hours) or Grindelwald (2½ hours). By the First cable-car summit station, there's the **Berggasthaus First** (☎ 033 853 12 84).

### Pfingstegg

Yet another cable car goes to **Pfingstegg** (☎ 033 853 26 26; www.pfingstegg.ch in German; single/return Sfr11.20/Sfr17; ☒ May-Oct). From here, you can take short hiking trails to Stieregg, near the Unterer Gletscher. Check to see whether the trail to **Hotel Wetterhorn** (☎ 033 853 12 18; www.hotel-wetterhorn.ch in German) at the base of the Oberer Gletscher (1½ hours) via the Restaurant Milchbach (one hour) is open. Along this, you pass the **Breitlowina**, a geologically fascinating terrace of rock scarred with potholes and scratches caused by moving ice.

There's also a popular summer **bobsled** ride at Pfingstegg.

### KLEINE SCHEIDEGG

This place is a mere huddle of buildings around the train station, yet it occupies an enviable position at the base of the Eiger. Most people only linger for a few minutes while changing trains for Jungfrauoch, but Kleine Scheidegg (2061m) is also a good base for hiking. There are short, undemanding trails, one hour apiece, to Eigergletscher, down to Wengernalp, and up the Lauberhorn behind the village. (These areas become intermediate ski runs from early December to April.) Alternatively, you can hike the Eiger Trail from Eigergletscher to Alpigen (2½ hours).

The train station has local information and money-changing facilities as well as a small post office.

### THE HILLS ARE ALIVE WITH THE SOUND OF HINDI

Confused by the curry buffet at Jungfrauoch? The answer is simple really. India's huge movie industry just adores a mountain, a waterfall or a lake as the backdrop to its unashamedly escapist song-and-dance sequences. So when the traditional location of Kashmir became too risky for Bollywood film crews to venture into, Switzerland began acting as its stunt double, its stand-in.

As a result, more Bollywood movies are now shot in the Alpine confederation than in any other foreign country, and thousands of loyal fans are following in their movie idols' footsteps here. Since the huge hit *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* was filmed here in 1995, dozens of other Indian blockbusters have followed and the number of Indian tourists to Switzerland has more than doubled. Huge tour groups arrive in the pre-monsoon months of May and June to visit their favourite locations, including Gstaad (p175), Engelberg/Titlis (p229) and Geneva (p59).

Basic dormitory accommodation can be found in **Restaurant Bahnhof Röstizzeria** (☎ 033 828 78 28; dm/s/d Sfr46/78/156, half board extra Sfr17), also in the train station, and the more recently renovated **Restaurant Grindelwaldblick** (☎ 033 855 13 74; dm Sfr40, half board extra Sfr21; ☒ closed Nov & May), eight minutes' walk towards Grindelwald.

**Hotel Bellevue Des Alpes** (☎ 033 855 12 12; s/d from Sfr170/270) is a formerly grand Victorian hotel – rambling, creaky and atmospheric. It has a world-beating location and a rather macabre history of people using its telescopes to observe mountaineering accidents on the Eiger.

### JUNGFRAUJOCH

Don't be deterred by the fact that everyone else wants to go to Jungfrauoch (3454m), nor by the fact that the trip is expensive (about Sfr175 from Interlaken). It's one of those once-in-a-lifetime trips that you have to experience first-hand to know what it's all about. And there is a reason why about two million people a year visit this, the highest train station in Europe; the views from the so-called 'top of Europe' are indisputably spectacular. Remember not to overdo things, though, because at this altitude there's one-third less oxygen in the air than at sea level.

The last stage of the train journey, from Kleine Scheidegg, passes through nearly 10km of rock before arriving at the sci-fi Sphinx meteorological station. (Little wonder that the tunnel, which was opened in 1912, took 16 years to drill.) Along the way, you stop several times inside the Eiger and Mönch, at Eigerwand and Eismeer, where there are viewing platforms, panoramic windows and vertiginous views.

Good weather really is essential for this journey; check on www.jungfrau.ch or call ☎ 100 62 from within Switzerland. Don't forget to take warm clothing, sunglasses and sunscreen. There's snow and glare up there all year and there's really no point coming all this way to stay indoors at Jungfrauoch.

Within the Sphinx weather station, where the trains disgorge their passengers, there's an ice palace gallery of ice sculptures, restaurants, places to send emails, souvenir shops and indoor viewing terraces.

However, outside there are spectacular views of the **Aletsch Glacier** (see p139), as well as distant landmarks like the Jura mountains and the Black Forest in Germany.

It's possible to walk across the glacier behind the Mönch on a marked path, enjoy a bit of tame skiing or boarding, drive a team of husky dogs or enjoy a range of other activities. If you cross the glacier along the prepared path, in 50 minutes you reach the **Mönchsjochlütte** (☎ 033 971 34 72; ☒ closed btwn seasons) at 3650m. This mountain hut offers dorms, refreshments and a great view across the mountains fringing the glacier.

From Interlaken Ost, the journey time is 2½ hours each way and the return fare is Sfr172.80 (Swiss/Eurail Pass Sfr126.40/111). The last train back is at 6.10pm in summer and 4pm in winter. However, there's a cheaper 'good morning' ticket of Sfr148.60 (Swiss/Eurail Pass discounts available) if you take the first train (6.35am from Interlaken) and leave the summit by noon. From 1 November to 30 April the reduction is valid for both the 6.35am and 7.35am trains, and the noon restriction doesn't apply.

Getting these early trains is less effort if you start from deeper in the region. Stay

overnight at Kleine Scheidegg and you can pick up the excursion-fare train at 8.02am in summer and at 8.02am or 9.02am in winter. From here, the 'good morning' return is Sfr65, instead of the full return of Sfr102 (Sfr52 with the Jungfrau Railways Pass). The farthest you can walk is up to Eigergletscher (2320m), which only saves you Sfr6.80/11.40 one way/return from Kleine Scheidegg.

Even the ordinary return ticket to Jungfrauoch is valid for one month, so you can use that ticket to form the backbone of your holiday travel, venturing as far as Grindelwald and stopping for a few days' hiking, before moving on to Kleine Scheidegg, Jungfrauoch, Wengen and Lauterbrunnen.

## LAUTERBRUNNEN

pop 2683 / elevation 806m

Lauterbrunnen's wispy Staubbach Falls (Staubbachfälle) inspired both Goethe and Lord Byron to compose poems to their ethereal beauty. However, contemporary Lauterbrunnen tends to attract a less high-faluting crowd. Friendly and full of unpretentious lodgings, the town is simply a great base for nature-lovers wishing to hike through the surrounding region.

The **tourist office** (☎ 033 856 85 68; www.wengen-muerren.ch; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-6pm daily May-Sep, 8am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri rest of year) is across from the train station, while the post office, bank, most hotels and sights are to the left of the station (as you face the tourist office).

Hotel Horner has Internet access for Sfr12 per hour and a dance bar (open until late).

If you're travelling to the car-free resorts above, there's a multistorey **car park** (☎ 033 828 71 11; www.jungfraubahn.ch; per day/week Sfr12/54) by the station, but you must book ahead. There is also an open-air car park by the Stechelberg cable-car station, charging Sfr8 for a day.

## Sights & Activities

Especially in the early-morning light, it's easy to see how the famous **Staubbachfälle** captivated several writers with their threads of spray floating down the cliffside.

The **Trümmelbachfälle** (☎ 033 855 32 32; www.truemmelbach.ch; adult/child Sfr10/4; ☎ 9am-5pm Apr-Nov, 8am-6pm Jun-Sep), on the other hand, are more of a bang-crash spectacle. Inside the mountain, up to 20,000L of water per second corkscrews through a series of ravines and potholes shaped by the swirling waters. The

falls drain from 24 sq km of Alpine glaciers and snow deposits. You reach the starting point via stairs or a lift and walk to the various 10 stages. A bus (Sfr3) from the train station takes you to the falls, which are along the valley floor towards Stechelberg. Take a raincoat, as you get quite damp – making this an ideal excursion in poor weather.

The valley floor is also good for **cross-country skiing** during the winter.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Camping Jungfrau** (☎ 033 856 20 10; camp sites per adult/tent from Sfr10.30/6, dm from Sfr26; ☎ year-round) This Rolls Royce of a camping ground offers supreme comfort and superb facilities. It even has wooden huts on site, although the whole setup might not appeal to those looking to get away from it all. It's a few minutes' walk south after the end of the main street, right near the Staubbach Falls.

**Valley Hostel** (☎ 033 855 20 08; www.valleyhostel.ch; dm/tw/d/f Sfr25/56/64/112; ☎ reception 10am-1pm & 2-10pm; ☎) Flying the Korean flag from the back garden facing the railway line, this clean, modern place has kitchen facilities, an attached laundromat and a cat.

**Chalet im Rohr** (☎ 033 855 21 82; r per person Sfr28) Its verandas bedecked with a blaze of multi-coloured flowers and flags, this wooden chalet is pretty as a picture from outside, but much more humble on the interior. Still, the owners and many regular guests are friendly and have a good sense of humour.

**Hotel Staubbach** (☎ 033 855 54 54; www.staubbach.com; s/d/tr/f Sfr90/100/150/170, s/d without bathroom from Sfr60/80) Next door, this hotel is better quality but still fairly old-fashioned, with an informal, friendly atmosphere. The best rooms have balconies, but these come with a Sfr10 supplement in summer.

**Hotel Oberland** (☎ 033 855 12 41; mains Sfr16.50-35) Received wisdom has it that this is Lauterbrunnen's best eating option and received wisdom is right. It serves a superior sort of rösti, pasta, salad and Swiss speciality.

## WENGEN

pop 1050 / elevation 1350m

Especially popular with British holiday-makers, Wengen rightfully boasts about its 'celestial views'. Perched on a mountain ledge, this car-free resort has a long view

(Continued from page 156)

down the Lauterbrunnen valley to peaks that remain snow-capped all year.

The **tourist office** (☎ 033 855 14 14; www.wengen-muerren.ch; ☎ 9am-6pm daily, closed Sat & Sun Nov & Mar-Apr) is minutes from the train station, taking a left at Hotel Silberhorn and continuing 100m farther on. Next door is the **post office**. Internet access is available a few steps along, at **Rock's Bar**.

The high point in Wengen's calendar is the international **Lauberhorn downhill ski race** in late January. The ski runs are reached by the cable car to Männlichen, or by train to Allmend, Wengernalp or Kleine Scheidegg. There's also a **ski school** (☎ 033 855 20 22). The same areas are excellent for hiking in the summer (see p154 for details on hiking from Männlichen). Some 20km of paths stay open in winter too. The hike down to Lauterbrunnen takes about an hour.

## Sleeping

**Old Lodge Backpackers** (☎ 078 745 58 50; www.old-lodge.ch; dm Sfr25-40, r Sfr35-60) This place looks pretty much as the name suggests, making it easily recognisable as you approach it down the path below Wengen's train station. In fact, it's a huge, rambling old lodge, with basic facilities, but it boasts a lively atmosphere and fantastic views.

**Hotel Bären** (☎ 033 855 14 19; www.baeren-wengen.ch; s/d from Sfr70/120, in winter from Sfr90/160) Also reached by looping back under the rail track and down the hill, this sweet little chalet hotel has a peaceful atmosphere and decent, if compact, rooms. Note that the rates it normally quotes include half-board.

**Hotel Belvedere** (☎ 033 856 68 68; www.belvedere-wengen.ch; s/d from Sfr100/160, in winter Sfr145/250) Set in leafy grounds, the Belvedere is notable for its wonderfully preserved Art Nouveau sitting room and good views. There's a range of renovated and unrenovated rooms.

## Eating

**Hotel Bären** (☎ 033 855 14 19; mains Sfr18-42; ☎ 11.30am-2pm & 6-11pm Tue-Sat, 6-11pm Sun & Mon) This family-run hotel puts a modern, international twist on Swiss food, and its restaurant is worth visiting, even if you're not staying.

**Da Sina** (☎ 033 855 31 72; pizzas Sfr12-27, other mains Sfr14-42; ☎ 11.30am-11.30pm high season, 11.30am-2pm

## AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Hotel Caprice** (☎ 033 856 06 06; www.ca-price-wengen.ch; standard d with view Sfr160-300, in winter Sfr460) If you're looking for pure luxury in the Jungfrau mountains, it's hard to think of a better place. Whereas most other top-end establishments in the region are opulent, historic and slightly overblown, the interior of this boutique hotel is modern and chic. The colour scheme is understated, with black, muesli and white tones, and the lounge has a stylish Scandinavian-style fireplace. Most importantly, the Caprice doesn't try too hard; you get the feeling that the charming service and excellent French food all just come naturally. It's closed between seasons.

& 6-11.30pm rest of year) In good weather, you can enjoy the terrace of this popular pizzeria-cum-steakhouse, while there's an attached pub/disco for après-ski entertainment.

**Chili's the Wengen Saloon** (most mains Sfr12-25) This is a young hang-out near the tourist office with drinks, bar food and a downstairs disco bar (winter only).

**Café Gruebi** (☎ 033 855 58 55; mains Sfr7-16; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 1-8pm Sun) Above the main street and run by a husband-and-wife team, Gruebi offers cheap Swiss eats and home-made cakes (baked almost daily by the...husband).

## MÜRREN

pop 320 / elevation 1650m

Arriving on a clear evening, as the train from Grütschalp seemingly floats along the horizontal ridge towards Mürren, the peaks across the valley feel so close that you could reach out and touch them. And that's when you'll think you've died and gone to Heidi heaven. Car-free Mürren is simply one of the most stunning spots in the region.

The **tourist office** (☎ 033 856 86 86; www.wengen-muerren.ch; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 9pm Thu, 8.30am-6pm Sun high season, 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-5pm Sun shoulder seasons, 8.30am-5pm Mon-Sat low season) is in the sports centre.

The main pursuits in the village are hiking and skiing, plus staring slack-jawed at the scenery.

In summer, the **Allmendhubel funicular** (one way/return Sfr12/7.40) takes you above Mürren to

(Continued on page 165)



a panoramic restaurant. From here, you can set out on many hikes, including the famous **Northface Trail** (2½ hours), via Schiltalp to the west, which offers outstanding views across the Lauterbrunnen valley. There's also an easier **Children's Adventure Trail** (one hour).

In winter, there are 50km of prepared ski runs nearby, mostly suited to intermediates, and a **ski school** (☎ 033 855 12 47). Mürren is known for the **Inferno Run** (Inferno-Rennen in German) down from Schilthorn in mid-January. Inaugurated in 1928, the difficult course now attracts nearly 2000 amateur skiers each year. It's also the reason for all the devilish soft-toy souvenirs.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Eiger Guesthouse** (☎ 033 856 54 60; www.eigerguesthouse.com; d with/without bathroom from Sfr130/Sfr110, in winter Sfr140/120, dm Sfr40-70; ☑) Run by a friendly and on-the-ball Swiss-Scottish couple, this humble abode offers pretty good value. Besides clean, freshened-up and comfortable rooms, you get a generous buffet breakfast.

**Hotel Alpenruh** (☎ 033 856 88 00; www.schilthorn.ch; s/d Sfr115/190, in winter Sfr140/260; ☑ ☒) Lots of loving detail has gone into this much-lauded chalet hotel near the Schilthorn cable car. Winky wreaths decorate every door and knick-knacks brighten up the stairwell. Past guests praise the service, food and views.

**Hotel Edelweiss** (☎ 033 86 56 00; edelweiss@muennen.ch; s/d Sfr95/190) While something of a concrete box from outside, this modern hotel does perch spectacularly on the edge of the cliff and offers vertiginous views through the large windows of its lounge and restaurant.

**Eiger Hotel** (☎ 033 855 54 54; www.hoteleiger.com; s/d from Sfr200/280; ☒ ☑) This elegant four-star establishment is most noteworthy for the absolutely amazing view from its swimming pool: the picture-windows frame not just the mighty Eiger, but the Mönch and Jungfrau, too.

**Tham's Snacks & Drinks** (☎ 033 856 01 10; mains Sfr15-28; ☒ noon-9pm daily Jul & Aug, on demand in low season) Tham's serves Thai, Singaporean, Malaysian and other Asian dishes cooked by a former five-star chef who's literally taken to the hills to escape the rat race.

**Restaurant La Grotte** (☎ 033 855 18 26; mains Sfr16.50-35; ☒ 11am-2pm & 5-9pm) This is the Hotel Blumental's rustic restaurant, highly regarded for its fondues and flambées, al-

though it's becoming slightly touristy in summer. Both it and Tham are along the lower main thoroughfare.

### GIMMELWALD

pop 140 / elevation 1370m

Tiny Gimmelwald has long been a bolthole for hikers and other adventurers wanting to escape the worst tourist excesses of the region. The secret is out, though, and this mountainside village – where you can sleep in the hay of what is now one of Switzerland's most famous barns – is becoming more popular (although, really, the views are better in Mürren).

The surrounding hiking trails include one down from more scenic Mürren (30 to 40 minutes) and one up from Stechelberg (1¼ hours). Cable cars are also an option (Mürren Sfr7.40, Stechelberg Sfr7.80).

### Sleeping & Eating

**Esther's Guest House** (☎ 033 855 54 88; www.esthersguesthouse.ch; r per person Sfr40-45) Esther's is a lovely B&B, serving its own jam and organic produce at breakfast. However, it's better known for its barn where, from June to October, you can enjoy the novelty – and surprising comfort – of sleeping in hay (Sfr22 including breakfast and shower).

**Mountain Hostel** (☎ 033 855 17 04; www.mountainhostel.com; dm Sfr20; ☒ check-in 5.30-10.30pm; ☑) A backpacking legend, this basic, low-ceilinged but incredibly friendly place now has a communal outdoor hot tub, where you can bathe while enjoying mountain views.

**Pension Gimmelwald** (☎ 033 855 17 30; www.pensiongimmelwald.ch; s/d Sfr87/135) Even the owners describe this as simple and rustic, but few want more in back-to-nature Gimmelwald. The restaurant, where most meals range from Sfr14 to Sfr26, is famous for its 'Gimmelwalder Horse Shit Balls' (an interestingly shaped sweet made from chocolate, almonds and sugar).

### SCHILTHORN

There's a fantastic 360° panorama from the 2970m **Schilthorn** (www.schilthorn.ch), one that's possibly even better than from Jungfrauoch. On a good day, you can see from Titlis around to Mont Blanc, and across to the German Black Forest. Yet, some visitors seem more preoccupied with practising their delivery of the line, 'The name's Bond, James

Bond', than taking in the 200 or so mountains. That's because a few scenes from *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* were shot here in late 1968/early 1969 – as the fairly tacky **Touristorama** below the **Piz Gloria** revolving restaurant will remind you.

From Interlaken, take a Sfr115 excursion trip (Half-Fare Card and Swiss Pass 50% off, Eurail Pass 25% off) going to Lauterbrunnen, Grütschalp, Mürren, Schilthorn and returning through Stechelberg to Interlaken. A return from Lauterbrunnen (via Grütschalp) and Mürren costs about Sfr100, as does the journey up and back via the Stechelberg cable car. A return from Mürren is Sfr65. Ask about discounts for early-morning trips.

En route from Mürren, the cable car goes through the Birg station (2677m), where you can also stop to take in fantastic views.

## THE LAKES

Anyone who travels to Interlaken for the first time from Bern will never forget the moment they clap eyes on Thunersee (Lake Thun). As the train loops past green pastures and tidy villages on the low southern shore, some people literally gasp at the sight of the mountains across the blue waters outdoing any picture-postcard image.

Brienzersee (Lake Brienz), flanking Interlaken to the east, doesn't have so many people lunging for their cameras. However, it's still very attractive and – before the 2005 floods at least – was said to be the cleanest lake in Switzerland.

Steamers run on both lakes from April to mid-October. There are no winter services on Brienzersee, whereas special cruises continue on Thunersee. For more information contact **BLS** (☎ 033 334 52 11; www.bls.ch). A day pass valid for both lakes costs Sfr50 (Sfr70 in 1st class, children half-price). Passes are also available for seven days or longer. Eurail Passes, the Regional Pass and the Swiss Pass are valid on all boats, and Inter Rail and the Swiss Half-Fare Card get 50% off.

The most famous ferry on Thunersee is the *Blümlisalp*, a paddlesteamer built in 1906.

### THUN

pop 40,236 / elevation 563m

Thun (pronounced toon) is a historic town with a strong feeling of youth, where he-

donistic crowds sun themselves at waterfront pavement cafés and funky shops fill the unusual medieval arcades.

The turreted castle sitting on the hill above is still the town's most visible feature, but today all Swiss most readily associate Thun with its football team. Having unexpectedly felled several European footballing Goliaths in recent years, minnows FC Thun have won a place in the nation's heart.

### Orientation

The town sits on the northern tip of its namesake lake, along the Aare River. The river separates the train station (which has bike rental and money-exchange counters) from the medieval centre around the castle. A sliver of land midstream, linked to both banks by footpaths and roads, has the pedestrianised street Bälliz running along it. The central area can easily be covered on foot.

### Information

**Main post office** (☎ 033 224 88 30; Bahnhofplatz; ☒ 7.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Opposite the train station.

**Manor** (☎ 033 227 36 99; Bahnhofstrasse 3; ☒ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-9pm Thu, 8am-4pm Sat) Internet access is available on the 1st floor of this supermarket.

**Tourist office** (☎ 033 222 23 40; www.thunersee.ch; Bahnhofplatz; ☒ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 1-4pm Sat Jul & Aug, 9am-noon & 1-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat rest of year)

### Sights & Activities

It's just a joy to wander through Thun, taking in the street scenes of coffee drinkers by river weirs, of ad hoc street stalls, and of cake-shop windows lined with confectionery footballs and other FC Thun sweets.

One street that should definitely not be missed is the split-level **Obere Hauptgasse**. Here, a series of quirky shops line the cobble pavement where cars drive – with a pedestrian footpath built along the top of these shops' roofs and another row of stores and bars in turn lining this footpath.

The 12th-century hilltop castle, **Schloss Thun**, once belonged to Duke Berchtold V of the powerful Zähringen family. Now it contains a **historical museum** (☎ 033 223 20 01; www.schlossthun.ch; adult/child Sfr7/2; ☒ 10am-5pm daily Apr-Oct, 1-4pm Sun Nov-Jan, 1-4pm daily Christmas, New Year, Feb & Mar), with local artefacts from prehistory to the 19th century.

There's another castle, **Schloss Schadau**, on the shore of the lake, but you can't go inside. Should you wish to cycle out here, free city bikes are available for loan from **Thun Rolt** (Aarefeldstrasse; passport & deposit of Sfr20; ☎ 7.30am-9.30pm May-Oct).

### Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel zu Metzger** (☎ 033 222 21 41; www.zumetzger.ch in German; Untere Hauptgasse 2; s/d without bathroom 1st night Sfr60/120, thereafter Sfr55/110; ☎ reception Tue-Sun) You'll find spartan but comfortable rooms above the popular restaurant of this historic hotel (1361). Downstairs, the chef uses organic ingredients in Swiss classics and interesting-sounding international recipes like lamb with a pistachio-herb crust, red-wine risotto and dahl with coconut vegetables (mains Sfr19 to Sfr38).

**Hotel Emmental** (☎ 033 222 01 20; www.essenundtrinken.ch in German; Bernstrasse 2; s/d Sfr80/160) Looking like a funky Swiss farmhouse in the middle of town, this is an eye-catching building. The ornately carved eaves have been sanded back to natural wood, while the slatted window shutters beneath them

have been painted a fashionable mint green. Inside, the rooms are stylish with vaguely 1970s bathrooms and not too much noise floats up from the popular bar below (well, not when we've stayed).

**Hotel Freienhof** (☎ 033 227 50 50; www.freienhof.ch in German; Freienhofgasse 3; s/d from Sfr165/215, with water views Sfr185/235; ☎ (P)) This leading hotel is in a lovely location facing the river, where you can feel the town's vibrant character. Rooms are sleek and modern, plus there's an excellent restaurant.

**Essen und Trinken** (☎ 033 222 48 70; Untere Hauptgasse 32; mains Sfr19-32; ☎ 5.30-11.30pm) Operated by the same concern as Hotel Emmental, this restaurant bills itself mainly as a trendy Tex-Mex venue, but also has fondue and rösti on the menu.

**Altes Waisenhaus** (☎ 033 223 31 33; Bällibz 61; mains Sfr26-35; ☎ 9am-midnight) This spacious waterfront restaurant at the start of the pedestrian zone gets lots of mealtime traffic for its excellent Italian cuisine. However, it's equally popular as a quick stop-off for homemade cake and ice cream, or an alcoholic drink.

### BUNKER MENTALITY

It used to be said that Switzerland didn't have an army, Switzerland was an army, and at the height of the Cold War this tiny country's attachment to compulsory national service meant that it had nearly one million soldiers on a 48-hour call-out. With recent army cuts, however (see the boxed text On Guard, p32), that's all changed, and the *Artilleriewerk* at Faulensee is among the first of 13,000 decommissioned facilities to fall back on that other Swiss standby – tourism.

The formerly **top-secret bunkers** (☎ 033 654 25 07; artfort@bluewin.ch) here were built to house troops displaced Thun, Spiez and the Lötschberg railway. Now, during summer, they're open to the public on the first Saturday of every month (adult/child Sfr9/5, 2pm to 5pm April to October). Cleverly disguised as farmhouses, the entrances to the bunkers are guarded by cannons, and connected by underground tunnels in which you'll find offices, laboratories, kitchens and cramped sleeping quarters.

Visitors are organised into ad hoc groups, and guided through the facility on the hour and half hour. Tours last 1½ to two hours, and you'll need warm clothing and good shoes. To ask about English explanations, call or email ahead. (With a group of six, you can also arrange a visit to the Swiss Army Museum Collection in Thun.)

Faulensee can be reached by bus from Spiez train station and from Interlaken West by boat (Sfr18/31 single/return).

### Entertainment

Each Thursday in July and August there are free folklore performances in Rathausplatz. Thun's most famous club is **Mokka** (www.mokka.ch in German; Allmendstrasse 14). However, the industrial area where most of the town's clubs are located could be up for redevelopment; check on the website for the latest details.

### Getting There & Away

Thun is on the main north-south train route from Frankfurt to Milan and beyond. From Interlaken West, Thun is Sfr14.20 each way by train, Sfr28 by boat.

### SPIEZ

pop 11,924 / elevation 628m

Hunched around a horseshoe-shaped bay, with a medieval castle rising out of its midst, the oft-overlooked town of Spiez is resplendent in summer with coloured blooms. Its lush vegetation includes a vineyard, for which its well known.

### Orientation & Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 033 654 20 20; www.thunersee.ch; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Sat summer, 8am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri winter) is outside the train station. It is open shorter hours in the shoulder seasons and has an Internet terminal. Seestrasse, the main street, is down to the left, and ultimately leads to the castle (15 minutes).

### Sights & Activities

The castle, **Schloss Spiez** (☎ 033 654 15 06; www.spiez.ch in German; adult/child/concession Sfr7/2/5; ☎ 2-5pm Mon, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Easter-mid-Oct, 10am-6pm Jul-mid-Sep), displays portraits of its former masters, the influential von Bubenberg and von Erlach families and fine examples of medieval rooms. But the highlight is the view, whether from the banqueting hall or from the vertiginous tower (which also sports 13th-century graffiti).

Near the castle is the small **Heimat und Rebbaumuseum** (admission free; ☎ 2-5pm Wed, Sat & Sun May-Oct) with exhibits on wine culture and cultivation.

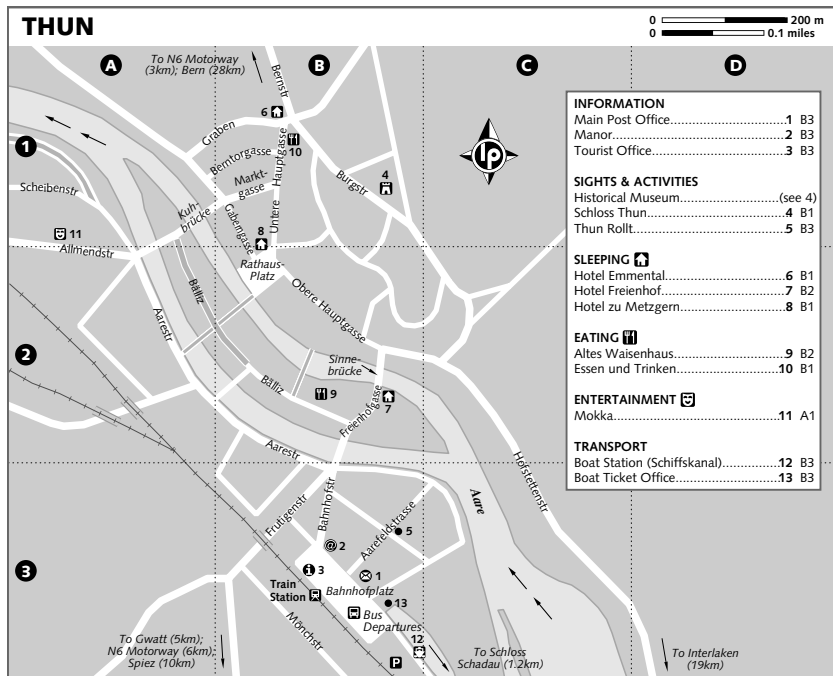
There there's a vintage wine festival, the **Läset-Fescht**, in September.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel Des Alpes** (☎ 033 654 33 54; Seestrasse 34; s/d from Sfr80/140) Little personal touches in the decoration and a friendly air help make this relatively humble abode one of Spiez's nicer places to stay.

**Strandhotel Belvédère** (☎ 033 655 66 66; www.belvedere-spiez.ch; Schachenstrasse; s/d from Sfr130/270; ☎ Mar-Jan) This refined four-star hotel mixes traditional furnishings with modern spa facilities. Overlooking the lake from a quiet but central spot, it has a gourmet French restaurant (mains from Sfr36.50).

**Hotel Bellevue** (☎ 033 654 84 64; www.bellevue-spiez.ch; Seestrasse 36; s/d from Sfr75/125; (P)) This option is between the train station and the



lake. Its rooms are perfectly adequate, and little more, although some of them do enjoy good views.

You'll find many, rather ordinary, pizza and pasta places around the boat station.

### Getting There & Away

From Interlaken West, Spiez is Sfr9.20 each way by train. By boat it's Sfr13.60 from Thun and Sfr18 from Interlaken West.

## LAKE THUN

### Castles & Museums

As well as the castles within Thun and Spiez themselves, there are a couple others dotted around Thunersee (Lake Thun). These are easily reachable by boat for a right royal day out.

**Schloss Oberhofen** (☎ 033 243 12 35; Oberhofen; adult/child Sfr5/1; ☎ 2-5pm Mon, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun mid-May-mid-Oct) is probably the best of the bunch. Bernese troops wrested it from Habsburg control after the Battle of Sempach (1386) and it now documents Bernese life from the 16th to the 19th centuries. There's a medieval chapel, an ornate Napoleonic drawing room and, its biggest draw, a Turkish smoking room. In the landscaped **gardens** (admission free; ☎ 10am-dusk, mid-Mar-mid-Nov) there's a children's chalet with toys.

Another advantage of choosing to visit this castle is that just east of it, on Wichterheer Estate, lies the stunning **Sammlung im Obersteg** (☎ 033 243 30 38; Wichterheer Estate, Oberhofen; adult/student Sfr8/6; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun mid-May-mid-Oct). This is a fine private collection of modern art, much better than anything you'd expect to find here, with works by Picasso and Chagall.

Oberhofen is 25 minutes by boat from Thun (services approximately hourly), or you can take a bus (14 minutes, every quarter of an hour).

**Schloss Hünegg** (☎ 033 243 1982; www.schlosshuenegg.ch in German; Staatsstrasse 52, Hilterfingen; adult/child Sfr8/1.50; ☎ 2-5pm daily, plus 10am-noon Sun mid-May-mid-Oct) is also more plus than the castles in Spiez and Thun. With heavy brocades, carpets and furniture in its fabulous 19th-century bathrooms and salons, and gleaming nickel-plated bathtub and taps in the bathroom, it provides a fascinating mix of neo-Renaissance and Art Nouveau styles.

### Water Sports

All manner of water sports are practised on Thunersee, from swimming, sailing and messing around in small boats to windsurfing, water-skiing and wake-boarding. The Thun tourist office has a complete list of centres and schools in its *Thunersee* brochure, or see [www.thunersee.ch](http://www.thunersee.ch).

**Camping Gwatt** (☎ 033 336 40 67; camping.gwatt@tcs.ch; Gwattstrasse 103; adult & car Sfr10.90, tent Sfr8.40-10.40, Modulhotel per person Sfr30-90; ☎ May-Oct) offers windsurfing, as well as family/group accommodation in its unusual 'Modulhotel' – five large plastic tubes laid on their side and fitted with bunk beds.

### BRIENZ

pop 2921 / elevation 566m

Right on the edge of its aqua-coloured namesake lake, looking across the water to the mountains opposite, Brienz is a sleepy little village fitting for a day or two's escape from the world. As a convenient base for visiting the well-known Freilichtmuseum Ballenberg, it's also the centre of Switzerland's wood-carving industry and within easy reach of the popular Giessbach Falls. However, it suffered badly during the 2005 floods, becoming one big mudslide, and had a long, hard task returning to normality.

### Orientation & Information

The train station, boat station, Rothorn Bahn and post office are all within a stone's throw of each other in the centre. The **tourist office** (☎ 033 952 80 80; www.alpenregion.ch; ☎ 8am-6pm daily Apr-Oct, 8am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar) is in the train station.

### Sights & Activities

The **Rothorn Bahn** (☎ 033 952 22 22; www.brienz-rot-horn-bahn.ch; single/return Sfr46/72, 25% discount with Swiss Pass; ☎ hourly from 7.30am-4.30pm daily May-Oct) is the only steam-powered cogwheel train still operating in Switzerland, climbing 2350m, from where you can embark on several hikes or just enjoy the views. A standard diesel train is used instead of a steam engine before 9.30am and again around lunchtime, so check with the office if you that's important for you. Sometimes there's a train decorated with pictures of Hopp the Steam Railway Ghost – to keep the children happy. Walking to the top from Brienz takes around five hours.

There are many touristy shops and boutiques along Hauptstrasse, selling locally carved statues, music boxes and cuckoo clocks. Several outlets also open their attached workshops, including **Jobin**, which has been in business since 1835. There's more to see in its **Living Museum** (☎ 033 952 13 00; Hauptstrasse 111; admission Sfr5, guided tour Sfr15; ☎ 8am-7pm daily Apr-Nov, 8am-6pm Mon-Sat Dec-Mar, individual entry not allowed 11.30am-2pm) than you'll find at **Walter Stähli** (☎ 033 951 06 06; Hauptstrasse 41; tours free; ☎ 8am-7pm).

### Sleeping & Eating

**Camping Aaregg** (☎ 033 951 18 43; www.aaregg.ch; camp sites per adult/car & tent Sfr11/18; ☎ Apr-Oct) This lakeside camp site was devastated by the 2005 floods, but vowed to rebuild its facilities to the same excellent standard. It's a 10-minute walk east of the train station, in the opposite direction to the town centre.

**SYHA hostel** (☎ 033 951 11 52; www.youthhostel.ch/brienz; Strandweg 10; 10- & 14-bed dm Sfr25.40, d Sfr60.80; ☎ reception closed 10am-5pm) The nearby hostel is adequate, rather than appealing, with large dorms and quite basic facilities, although it has good lake views. The hostel is closed from mid-October to January.

**Hotel Weisses Kreuz** (☎ 033 952 20 20; www.weisses-kreuz-brienz.ch in German; Hauptstrasse 143; s/d/tr Sfr110/160/175) Conveniently located close to the train station, this old-fashioned chalet building has all modern amenities, and an interesting list of past guests that ranges from Goethe and Byron to Richard Nixon. The restaurant also seems quite popular locally.

**Hotel Lindenhof** (☎ 033 952 20 30; www.hotel-lindenhof.ch; Lindenhofweg 15; s Sfr120-160, d Sfr160-230) Brienz's most interesting hotel is spread over five buildings higher up the hill than Schöneegg. There's a range of individually decorated rustic rooms, encompassing everything from flowery murals and canopy beds to forest themes, bales of hay above the bed and a 'smuggler's retreat'. An 'eyrie' bedroom offers wonderful views.

**Tea-Room Hotel Walz** (☎ 033 951 14 59; Hauptstrasse 102; menus Sfr18-30; ☎ 8am-10.30pm daily, 8am-6.30pm Thu-Tue in winter) This place has healthy meals, biscuits and cakes. The latter includes the unfortunate-sounding but tasty speciality Brienzler Krapfen, pastries filled with dried pears.

**Seerestaurant Löwen** (☎ 033 951 12 41; Hauptstrasse 8; most mains Sfr20-42; ☎ mid-Mar-late Dec) Take a

seat on the lakeside terrace and choose from a wide range of fish dishes, including perch in beer batter, catfish in wholegrain mustard, and monkfish in green curry sauce. Meat-lovers and vegetarians are also catered for.

### Getting There & Away

From Interlaken Ost, Brienz is accessible by train (Sfr7.20) or boat (Sfr19.80, April to mid-October). The scenic Brüning Pass (1008m) is the road route to Lucerne.

## AROUND BRIENZ

### Freilichtmuseum Ballenberg

The **Ballenberg Open-Air Museum** (☎ 033 952 10 30; www.ballenberg.ch; adult/child Sfr16/8; ☎ buildings 10am-5pm daily, grounds 9am-6pm mid-Apr-end Oct) is a kind of Disneyland-like rural Switzerland of yore. East of Brienz, this 80-hectare park contains some 100 authentic century-old buildings, in which traditional Swiss crafts and customs – from hat-making and bobbin-lace making to herding cows decked with ribbons and bells back to base – are displayed. The houses were brought here from all over the country and show a range of regional architectural styles. There are more than 250 farm animals, woodlands and a range of gardens, with vegetables and medicinal herbs on site.

Ballenberg is too big to absorb in one visit, so don't even try. Instead, pick up a plan at the entrance (Sfr2), check the times of special demonstrations on the board, and work out an itinerary.

There are two entrances, at the west and east of the site, and car parks at each. The nearest train station is Brienzwiler. A good option is to take the bus (Sfr3 each way) that leaves from outside Brienz train station. It's often packed, but at least you can get off at one entrance and leave by the other, without having to retrace your steps.

### Giessbachfälle

It's their setting on a wooded hillside overlooking Brienzensee that makes the 500m-tall **Giessbach Falls** worth visiting. An old-fashioned funicular runs up from the boat station (one way/return Sfr4.50/6) but the walk doesn't take long. Various footpaths traverse the surrounding hillside. Giessbach is easily reached by boat (return from Brienz Sfr13.60, from Interlaken Ost Sfr27).

The room categories at the grand old 19th-century **Grand Hotel Giessbach** (☎ 033

952 25 25; www.giessbach.ch; s Sfr130-170, d Sfr150-330; (☔ May-Oct) overlooking the falls say it all: 'Nostalgic', 'Romantic' and 'Bellevue'. It's idyllically situated high on the mountain above the lake, surrounded by forest. Some just come on a day trip from Interlaken for lunch in the panoramic restaurant.

## EAST BERNESE OBERLAND

The Hasli Valley (Haslital), east of the Jungfrau Region, is a popular hiking spot, and a good base for embarking on tours across the Grimsel and Susten passes.

### MEIRINGEN

pop 4660 / elevation 595m

When the writer Arthur Conan Doyle left his fictional detective Sherlock Holmes for dead at the base of the Reichenbach Falls near Meiringen, he ensured there was a corner of Switzerland that would forever remain English-eccentric. Every 4 May, fans in deerstalker hats and tweed capes still congregate here for the anniversary of Holmes' 'death'.

Meiringen's other claim to fame is for being the sweet-toothed birthplace of meeringue. For many visitors, though, it's simply a good base for taking hikes, especially through two nearby river gorges and across

Europe's highest and longest pedestrian suspension bridge.

### Orientation

The town is north of the Aare River. As you exit the train station (bike rental available), you'll see the main post office and bus station opposite. Head straight ahead past the Hotel Meiringen, turn right onto the main thoroughfare, and in a few minutes you'll reach the tourist office.

### Information

**alpenregionCARD** (6/13 days Sfr35/55; ☔ Apr-Oct) Offers a range of discounts, including for boats, some scenic bus routes, cable cars, the Freilichtmuseum Ballenberg, the Reichenbachfall funicular and the Rothorn Bahn.

**Tourist office** (☎ 033 972 50 50; www.alpenregion.ch; Bahnhofstrasse; ☔ 8am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 8-11am & 4.30-6pm Sat, 4.30-6pm Sun Jul & Aug, 8am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon & 3-5pm Sat rest of year)

### Sights & Activities

Gazing over the mighty **Reichenbachfälle** (Reichenbach Falls), where the water cascades to the ground with a deafening roar, you can see how Arthur Conan Doyle thought them perfect for dispatching his increasingly burdensome hero, Sherlock Holmes. In 1891, in *The Final Problem*, Conan Doyle acted like one of his own villains and pushed both Holmes and Holmes' arch-enemy, Dr Moriarty, over the precipice here. From that moment on, fans have been flocking

to the site. (This is despite the fact that, after Conan Doyle failed in his quest to become a 'serious' writer, he gave in to public pressure and resurrected Holmes in 1903's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*).

**Reichenbach funicular** (☎ 033 972 90 10; www.reichenbachfall.ch; adult one way/return Sfr6/8, child Sfr3/5; ☔ 9am-6pm Jul & Aug, 9-11.45am & 1.15-5.45pm daily May, Jun, Sep & Oct) carries you from Willigen, south of the Aare River, to the top. It takes nearly an hour to walk back down to Meiringen. Alternatively, you can take the steep paths up the side of the falls to the village of Zwirgi. At Gasthaus Zwirgi, you can rent Trotti-bikes (adult/child Sfr19/14) and ride back to Meiringen.

Zwirgi is at the start of the scenic **Reichenbach Valley**, which runs towards Grindelwald. A path leads to the village of Rosenloui and the **Gletscherschlucht** (Glacier Gorge; ☎ 033 971 24 88; www.rosenloui.biz; adult/child Sfr7/3.50 ☔ 9am-6pm Jun-Sep, 10am-5pm May & Oct). The walk back to Meiringen takes at least two hours, but hourly buses also ply the route from June to September.

If you're a real fan, you might care to visit the **Sherlock Holmes Museum** (☎ 033 971 42 21; www.sherlockholmes.ch; Bahnhofstrasse 26; adult/child Sfr4/3, combined with Reichenbachfall funicular Sfr11/7; ☔ 1.30-6pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 4.30-6pm Wed-Sun rest of year) in the basement of the English church back in Meiringen.

Otherwise, it's better to keep to exploring the region. Less than 2km from the town, towards the village of Innertkirchen, is the steep and narrow **Aareschlucht** (Aare Gorge; ☎ 033 971 40 48; www.aareschlucht.ch; adult/child Sfr7/3.5; ☔ 8am-6pm daily Jul & Aug, plus 9-11pm Wed & Fri, 9am-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep-Oct). The gorge has two entrances: the main western entrance near Meiringen and the lesser-used eastern one near Innertkirchen. The **MIB** (☎ 033 982 10 11; www.grimselstrom.ch; adult one way/return Sfr3/6, child Sfr2/3; ☔ 6am-7pm) is a train running half-hourly on weekdays, less often on weekends, from Meiringen and Innertkirchen to Aareschlucht West, near the western entrance.

There's skiing and snowboarding in the region (mainly intermediate and also some beginner runs; Sfr52 for a day pass). The tourist office can provide details on this, as well as on mountaineering and paragliding.

For a brief season, a **cable car** (☎ 033 971 34 17; return summer/winter Sfr48/40) runs to the nearby 2250m-high revolving restaurant,

### AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Hotel Victoria** (☎ 033 972 10 40; www.victoria-meiringen.ch; Bahnhofplatz; s/d/tr from Sfr130/180/250; ☎ ☔) Stylish but relaxed, the Victoria is Meiringen's equivalent of a design hotel. Orchids, artfully arranged pieces of fruit, blue lounge chairs and dark hardwood floors give warmth to otherwise white rooms. A handful of board games is welcomingly scattered around the guest lounge.

the **Alpen Tower** (☎ 033 972 53 26; www.alpentower.ch in German; ☔ Jul & early Dec-Mar).

### Sleeping

**Hasli Lodge** (☎ 033 971 59 00; www.haslilodge.ch; Kirchgasse 11; dm Sfr35-40, s Sfr60-65, d Sfr100-120; ☎) This has swiftly become the cool place to hang out in Meiringen for adventure-sports fans, hikers, backpackers, musicians and the like. A converted budget hotel (the 'Weisses Kreuz' emblem is still on the carpet), its rooms are quite old, but decent. There's a popular bar/restaurant with a brief menu.

**Hotel Rebstock** (☎ 033 971 07 55; www.hotel-rebstock.ch in German; Bahnhofstrasse; new s/d Sfr125/180, old s/d with bathroom Sfr90/150, old s/d without bathroom Sfr75/120; ☎ ☎) The Rebstock is a hotel of two halves. The 14 light-filled, minimalist bedrooms in its new wing cater to upmarket tastes; the 14 in its older wing are growing slightly shabby, but still offer good value.

**Park Hotel du Sauvage** (☎ 033 971 41 41; www.sauvage.ch; Bahnhofstrasse; s/d from Sfr110/200) Sherlock Holmes' creator, Arthur Conan Doyle, once stayed in this opulent belle époque gem, and today it honours his memory by hosting many murder-mystery weekends.

### Eating

**Hotel Victoria** (bistro menu Sfr11-30, restaurant menu Sfr24-44; ☔ 9am-midnight) With its new terrace and accompanying garden dotted with a few quirky sculptures, this is a good spot for a not-too-formal bite. The cuisine is mostly modern European, with a supplementary sushi menu on Fridays and Saturdays.

**Hotel Alpbach** (☎ 033 971 18 31; Kirchgasse 17; mains Sfr24-48; ☔ 8.30am-midnight) The traditional wooden interior is patently a modern re-creation, but the food is the genuine article. Dishes range from Chinese meat

### BRIDGE OVER MELTING WATERS

Meiringen's latest attraction comprises a glacier underneath Europe's longest and highest pedestrian suspension bridge. Opened in 2005, the 102m-long **Triftbrücke** (Trift Bridge; www.trift.ch in German) is already a huge hit with hikers who come to balance above the majestic Trift glacier, as it becomes melt-water more swiftly than it once did. It's a simultaneously impressive and terrifying sight, as one wrestles with both vertigo and pessimism about the warmer global future.

The bridge was built in response to hikers' requests and can be reached because the local power company has opened its renovated cable car to public use. To get to the base station, catch any bus from Meiringen heading to Sustenpass or Gadmen and alight at 'Käppel bei Nesselental, Trift' (Sfr8.60, Swiss Pass valid). Alternatively, catch the MIB train from Meiringen to Innertkirchen Post and pick up a bus there.

The **cable car** (☎ 033 982 20 11; www.grimselstrom.ch; one way/return Sfr10/18; ☔ 9am-4pm Jun-Oct) takes you up to 1022m, from where it's a 1½-hour walk to the bridge (1870m). The high Alpine scenery is so spectacular that you might want to spend a couple of days up here and, if so, you can overnight in one of two mountain huts: the **Windegghütte** (www.windegghuette.ch in German), 20 minutes from the bridge, or the **Trifthütte** (www.trifthuette.ch in German), three hours above it.

The hike from the cable-car base station to the bridge takes about 3½ hours. Tourist offices in Meiringen and Brienz can provide flyers with a basic map.

### ALPINE PASS TOURS

Between early July and early October, you can spend a full sunny day enjoying a wonderful four-Alpine-pass tour from Meiringen. From here, it's possible to make a circular bus trip crossing the Grimsel, Nufenen, Gotthard and Susten passes, enjoying stupendous views of snowy peaks, lakes and several glaciers along the way.

At the time of writing, the bus left Meiringen at 9.20am and returned at 5.30pm. However, the tours on offer change each year, so check with **Berner Oberland Postal Bus** (☎ 0900 304 304, 033 828 88 38; www.postalbus.ch/travel) for all the latest details. Alternatively, you'll find information at Meiringen's train station or at the **postal bus office** (🕒 8.15-11.15am) opposite. Reservations are advisable.

The fare is Sfr118 for adults or – and here's the major selling point – Sfr25 for holders of a Swiss Pass. Children travel free.

There is a range of other routes from Meiringen (including to Grosse Scheidegg and Grindelwald, see p153) or Andermatt (p234).

Of course, if you have a car, you can set your own itinerary. Do note, however, that the passes are closed to all traffic from late October to late June.

fondue or rösti with veal to noodles with Indian-style giant prawns.

**Café Brunner** (☎ 033 971 14 23; Bahnhofstrasse 8; menus Sfr14.50-18.50; 🕒 7am-8pm) One of the town's best purveyors of meringue, this café also does a range of salads, savoury pancakes and other simple meals.

### Getting There & Away

Frequent trains go to Lucerne (Sfr18.80, 80 minutes; with a scenic ride over the Brünig Pass) and Interlaken Ost (Sfr10.40, 30 minutes, via Brienz). In summer, buses and cars can take the pass southeast (to Andermatt), but the road southwest over Grosse Scheidegg (to Grindelwald) is closed to private vehicles.

## WEST BERNESE OBERLAND

At the western side of the Jungfrau are Simmental and Frutigland, dominated by two river valleys, the Simme and the Kander. Farther west is Saanenland, known mainly for the ski resort of Gstaad.

### KANDERSTEG

pop 1165 / elevation 1176m

Turn up in Kandersteg wearing anything but sturdy boots and you'll attract a few odd looks. Hiking is this town's raison d'être, with 550km of surrounding trails, both summer and even winter. Skiing and climbing are other popular activities.

The **tourist office** (☎ 033 675 80 80; www.kandersteg.ch; 🕒 8am-noon & 1.30-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon & 1.30-4.30pm Sat Jun-Sep, 8am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fr Apr-Jun & Oct-Nov, 8am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon & 2-4.30pm Sat Dec-Mar) can help with suggested hiking routes. The office is in the village centre, straight ahead from the train station then left on the main street.

To the east is the spectacular **Oeschinensee** (Lake Oeschinen; www.oeschinensee.ch), beautifully situated among the mountains. An old-fashioned chair lift, the **Rodelbahn** (☎ 033 675 11 18; one way/return Sfr14/19; 8.45am-4.45pm May-Oct, 7.30am-6.15pm Jun-Sep) takes you to within 20 minutes of the lake by foot. Once there, it takes an hour to walk back down to Kandersteg.

In winter there are 75km of cross-country ski trails, including the iced-over Oeschinensee, while 55km of hiking tracks stay open. The limited downhill skiing is suited to beginners and day passes cost Sfr34.

The **Blausee** (Blue Sea) and its namesake **nature park** (☎ 033 672 33 33; admission Sfr4.50) lie 5km to the north of Kandersteg (reachable by bus or on foot). This lake is famous for its fresh trout.

### Sleeping

Kandersteg's popularity with hikers means there's lots of cheaper accommodation, but many places are closed between seasons.

**Ruedihorn** (☎ 033 675 81 81; www.doldenhorn-ruedihorn.ch; s/d from Sfr100/200) This gem of a cosy chalet dating from 1753 has been wonderfully renovated to combine quaintness with comfort. With low ceilings, small windows

and antique furniture, it's in a field south of the Hotel-Pension National.

**Doldenhorn** (☎ 033 675 81 81; www.doldenhorn-ruedihorn.ch; s/d from Sfr120/200) Less unique but also slightly grander than its sister Ruedihorn, this chalet has a range of individually decorated rooms, from traditional to more modern, and a well-regarded restaurant.

**Hotel Victoria Ritter** (☎ 033 675 80 00; www.hotel-victoria.ch; s/d from Sfr125/210) This was once a coach tavern, now transformed into an elegant hotel. The Victoria side has traditional 19th-century décor, while rooms in the Ritter are more modern. Also an excellent choice for food.

**Camping Rendez-vous** (☎ 033 675 15 34; www.camping-kandersteg.ch; camp sites per adult/car Sfr7.50/3, tents Sfr6-12; 🕒 year-round) A relaxed site by the chair lift to Oeschinensee, this has decent washing and toilet facilities, as well as a shop. Its restaurant has a range of hearty fare (from Sfr14) including hamburgers and schnitzels.

Basic accommodation is available at **Hotel-Pension National** (☎ 033 675 10 85; dm Sfr30-38, s/d/tr Sfr60/100/120), and the huge **Pfadfinderzentrum** (International Scout Centre; ☎ 033 675 11 39; www.kisc.ch; camp sites Sfr10.50; dm Sfr21-27). To reach the Hotel-Pension National, turn right on the main street from the train station and follow the road for 15 minutes. A further 15 minutes on, you'll come to the Pfadfinderzentrum.

### Getting There & Away

Kandersteg is at the northern end of the Lötschberg Tunnel, through which the trains trundle to Goppenstein (30km from Brig) and onwards to Iselle in Italy. See www.bls.ch /autoverlad for more details. The traditional way to head south is to hike; it takes a little over five hours to get to the Gemmi Pass and a further 1¼ hours to reach Leukerbad.

### GSTAAD

pop 2500 / elevation 1100m

Synonymous with the international jet set, and fittingly twinned with Cannes in France, the resort of Gstaad appears smaller than its reputation – too little for its fur-lined ski boots. Renowned as a haunt of Sean Connery, Roger Moore, minor European royalty, heiresses like Paris Hilton and various wannabes, it's a picturesque but tiny village crouched beneath the hilltop fairytale turrets of its leading hotel, the Gstaad Palace. Cartier, Gucci, Hermès, Louis Vuitton and Rolex are

piled high in the chi-chi boutiques lining the pedestrianised Promenade, and it offers better après-ski window-shopping than actual skiing. While its principal competitive sports are seeing and being seen, ordinary mortals might enjoy the hiking opportunities.

### Orientation & Information

The train station is in the centre, parallel to the main street, Hauptstrasse. Walk straight ahead past Hotel Bernerhof to Hauptstrasse, turn right and go 200m east along the pedestrian-only section to reach the centre and the tourist office.

### Information

The three-day Easyaccess card (Sfr33) offers some free transport, guided tours and swimming and discounts on many activities.

There's a **tourist office** (☎ 033 748 81 81; www.gstaad.ch; Promenade; 🕒 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 1.30-5pm Sat & Sun Jul, Aug & Dec-Mar, 8.30am-noon & 1.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon & 1.30-5pm Sat rest of year).

### Activities

'Where does one actually ski in Gstaad?'; that's an oft-repeated complaint in this little resort. There is some **skiing**, but lifts around the village only go up to around 2200m, meaning snow is not guaranteed. Runs tend to be blue or easy red. For more varied skiing, head to neighbouring resorts like Saanen, Saanenmöser, St Stephan and Zweisimmen. These are only some of the places included in the Region Ski Gstaad, totalling 250km of runs. In all, 69 lifts are covered, some as far afield as Château d'Oex and Les Diablerets glacier (see p95). The regional pass is available for a minimum of two days (Sfr97); for single days, buy specific sectors (Sfr26 to Sfr52).

**Snowboarding** is better, especially above the Egli cable car, where there are snow-making machines. From here, you can reach the Videmanette area by chairlift and this offers some more challenging pistes.

There is a plethora of other activities. **Hiking** is possible in four valleys radiating out from Gstaad. An undemanding excursion is to walk to Turbach, over the Reulisenpass, and down to St Stephan or to Lenk in the adjoining Simmen Valley (around 4½ hours total). From either resort, a train runs back to Gstaad (change at Zweisimmen).

There's **rafting** on the Saane and nearby rivers, from May to September, from about Sfr82 to Sfr108. One large operator is **Alpinzentrum Gstaad** (☎ 033 748 41 61; www.alpinzentrum.ch), which also offers climbing, glacier tours and jeep safaris. The tourist office has details of other operators, including several offering canyoning and paragliding.

### Festivals & Events

During July, Gstaad hosts the annual **Alianz Suisse Open** (☎ 033 748 83 83; www.swissopengstaad.com) tennis tournament. Quaint Saanen nearby hosts a **Yehudi Menuhin Festival** (☎ 033 748 83 33; www.menuhinfestivalgstaad.ch) of classical music every August. It's held in Saanen's 15th-century Mauritian church and in a marquee in Gstaad.

### Sleeping

All hotel prices are high-season prices and drop at other times of the year.

**SYHA hostel** (☎ 033 744 13 43; www.youthhostel.ch/saanen; dm Sfr31; 🕒 reception 8-10am & 5-9pm, 8-10am & 4-10pm winter, closed mid-Oct-mid-Dec & sometimes Apr & May) This very pleasant hostel is at Chalet Rüblihorn in nearby Saanen, just four minutes away by train.

**Hotel Alphorn** (☎ 033 748 45 45; www.gstaad-alphorn.ch; Gsteigstrasse; s/d Sfr130/240; 📞) Try this if you're not A list, but want to make believe (sort of). Ten minutes from the centre near the ski school, it's a rustic Swiss chalet with renovated rooms, a small bar and generous buffet breakfast.

**Post Hotel Rössli** (☎ 033 748 42 42; www.posthotelroessli.ch; Promenade; standard s/d Sfr140/260) Another simple chalet hotel with pleasantly renovated rooms, this time the oldest hotel in town. Only doubles are available in the high season.

**Hotel Olden** (☎ 033 744 34 44; www.hotelolden.com; s/d Sfr380/420) Part-owned by Formula One boss Bernie Ecclestone, this central chalet has exclusive rooms, decorated in a belle époque style with a tub or steam bath in each room.

**Gstaad Palace** (☎ 033 748 50 00; www.palace.ch; s/d from Sfr350/600; 📞 🕒 📺 📞) The ultimate in luxury, this turreted fairytale palace casts its haughty gaze over the village from its hilltop vantage point. It's another Bollywood favourite, while the resort's top disco, Green Go, is also found up here.

### Eating & Drinking

**Post Hotel Rössli** (☎ 033 748 42 42; Promenade; mains Sfr17-27) This place has a reasonable, decently priced restaurant that serves Swiss staples.

**Hotel Bernerhof** (☎ 033 748 88 44; www.bernerhof-gstaad.ch; mains Sfr18-40, menus from Sfr45) Another good restaurant within a hotel, with reasonable prices. It offers upmarket Chinese.

**Spoon des Neiges** (www.chlosterli.com; mains Sfr52-65, fixed 3-course menu Sfr105) Famed French chef Alain Ducasse has opened this restaurant in Le Chlösterli (www.chlosterli.com), an amazing restaurant/bar/club complex a 10-minute drive from town. An old Swiss inn that's been transformed with postmodern design, Chlösterli has a 6m-tall glass wall dividing the public spaces from the kitchens, a bunch of lit monitors, like a tree of fire, instead of a fireplace, and some stools that look like hay bales. There's also a cheaper restaurant, Alpen Bistro (mains Sfr35 to Sfr50).

**Charly's** (☎ 033 744 15 44; Promenade) Renowned for its apple tart, patisseries and chocolate, the most famous tea room in town has reopened in a new home with a huge aquarium and 'interesting' paintings on its façade.

**Chesery** (☎ 033 744 24 51; Lauenenstrasse; menus from Sfr140-160; 🕒 noon-2pm & 6.30-9.30pm Tue-Sun Dec-Apr & Jun-Oct) Founded by the Aga Khan in the 1960s, this ritzy – and pricey – chalet

restaurant goes from strength to strength, with chef Robert Speth recently named GaultMillau chef of the year. Downstairs there's a bar.

**Hush** (☎ 033 748 15 00; Promenade) The sister bar of the Mayfair establishment in London and also owned by Roger Moore's son, Geoffrey (among others), this brasserie, lounge and club is a favourite haunt of the beautiful people.

### Getting There & Away

Gstaad is on the Golden Pass route between Montreux (Sfr23, 1½ hours) and Spiez (Sfr24, one hour 20 minutes; change at Zweisimmen). You can get to Geneva airport (Sfr45, three hours) via Montreux. A postal bus goes to Les Diablerets (Sfr12.40, 50 minutes) about five times daily. Highway 11 is the principal road connecting Aigle and Spiez, and it passes close to Gstaad at Saanen.

#### MOUNTAIN FEAST

If Gstaad's ritzy restaurants aren't for you, in season you can head for the area's good batch of mountain restaurants at the summit station of the cable cars up from the valley floor. The gourmet **Berghaus Eggli** (☎ 033 748 96 12) and the family-friendly **Berghaus Wispile** (☎ 033 748 96 32) even host fondue, raclette and wine evenings in winter, where guests head home on skis.

Further above Eggli is the gimmicky-but-fun **Videmanette Berghaus** (☎ 026 925 87 44), where staff dress in army uniforms and guests eat from a *Gamelle*, an army-issue food container. Above the nearby village of Schönried, **Horneggli Berghaus** (☎ 033 744 27 57) has a hunting theme. Most cheap mains are about Sfr25.

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