

Client: Switzerland Tourism Yellow News
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Leave your skis behind

DOMINIC BAREHAM discovers there's plenty to do in Switzerland besides alpine sports — like visiting lovely [Lucerne](#).

With the winter season upon us, many will be dreaming of escaping the damp and dreary British weather.

However, those tempted to book a flight to far-flung climes for some sunshine or winter sports should consider options closer to home and Switzerland offers the best of all worlds — a place to relax by a warm spa pool and enjoy a therapeutic massage or to take a hike up the stunning Alps mountains with incredible views over hundreds of miles.

The Alpine country is perhaps most well-known in the UK as a ski destination, but as I discovered during my four-day stay there is much more to see and do besides winter sports.

Upon arrival at Zurich airport, I was whisked in a comfortable and spacious train (which, of course, was on time — the Swiss are famous for their punctuality) to the picturesque lakeside city of Lucerne and the stunning 13th-century Hotel Des Balances, which is perfectly positioned overlooking the River Reuss.

The hotel used to be home to one of the city's many craft guilds, as well as the courthouse and this rich history is reflected in artwork on the outside walls created in the style of the famous Swiss artist Hans Holbein.

In fact, painting the outside walls of buildings was a popular pastime in Lucerne, where historic artwork is on display everywhere and there are many facades that tell a tale or two about the building's history.

The city, which has a strong Roman Catholic and Jesuit heritage, was built on a key trading route for goods from Italy and the Mediterranean during an age when ships were the main form of transport and some of these products were sold in the city's market place, especially wine.

Not surprisingly then, water is a key feature of the city, whether it is the clear, free-flowing tide on the River Reuss, which has come down from the beautiful Mt Pilatus overlooking the city to link up with Lake Luzern, or the 225 fountains, 59 of which are on private property, offering drinkable water.

Boat trips are available on ferry cruisers across the lake, while the city also has a number of old-fashioned steamers.

In a city brimming with Renaissance art on public display, many of these fountains bear elaborate carvings representing famous figures in Lucerne's past, including one fountain supposedly placed over the grave of Brother Fritschi, who was believed to be the head of one of the city's guilds.

The Chapel Bridge, which crosses the Reuss, is another of Lucerne's wonders, built in the 14th century as part of the city's fortifications where visitors can walk along a covered wooden path decked with flowers and overlooked by 17th-century paintings illustrating Switzerland's history.

At the end of the bridge is a stone tower which used to be one of the city's prisons and just across the way from the entrance to the bridge is the huge Jesuitenkirche, or Jesuit church, built in the 17th century by Father Christoph Volger for the Jesuits.

However, Lucerne is not just rich in history, there is also the modern KKL Luzern congress centre by Lake Luzern, which was built by Parisian architect Jean Nouvel. It boasts a 1,840-seat concert hall, the perfect place for the city's many cultural events throughout the year.

An hour's train journey from Lucerne is the pretty ski resort of Engelberg (or Angel Mountain), which sits in a valley at the bottom of Mt Titlis, at 10,000ft one of the highest mountains in the Swiss Alps.

Visitors can choose between taking a cable car trip to the snow-covered peak or, for the more energetic, a hike.

Either way, the view on the way up is spectacular and cable car travellers are able to switch to a special revolving gondola offering spectacular vistas of the summit and the valley below from all angles.

At the top, the Titlis Glacier Station provides the opportunity to take photos of the incredible view from a viewing platform and relax with a drink or meal at one of the centre's cafes and



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restaurants.

A short ski lift trip down the side of the mountain leads to a sledge run and the chance to have some fun and practice your skills with a sleigh, which would be especially popular with children.

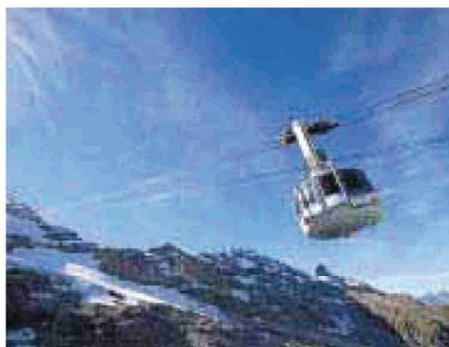
Those who have often wondered what the inside of a glacier is like need wonder no more as visitors can take a fascinating tour inside a Glacier Cave, while there is also crevasse abseiling and a guided glacier hike, so visitors will not get bored at the top.

Add to this the numerous ski slopes and even a ski jump at the bottom of the mountain, which hosts regular competitions then Engelberg and Mt Titlis are rarely quiet.

A short boat trip from Lucerne is Mt Rigi, standing at 1,800m high, which can be reached by travelling on Europe's first ever mountain railway, opened in 1871.

The summit offers views of France and Germany on one side and the other stunning Alpine peaks on the other, while during the summer there is a programme of cultural events, including a folklore festival, Alpine wrestling championship and farmers market. The peak is popular with the hiking community and has a number of trails, as well as numerous hotels and restaurants down the mountainside.

Lucerne is well worth considering if you have not yet decided where to spend your winter holiday.



Get Packing

For more information on Lucerne, visit www.luzern.com. To find out more about Mt Titlis, visit www.titlis.ch and for more details on CabriO and Mt Stanserhorn visit www.stanserhorn.ch.

More information about Mt Rigi can be found at www.mineralbad-rigikaltbad.ch and for more on the Swiss Museum of Transport www.verkehrshaus.ch



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