

Linger in Lucerne

Laid-back charm, crystal clear lakes and mesmerising mountains – Lucerne has it all.

WORDS BEV MALZARD

I WAS LATE ARRIVING IN LUCERNE. IT wasn't a Swiss train running late, it was me, at the last stop huffing and puffing up stairs with my big, fat suitcase, and as I hit the platform the train silently glided out of the station. Damn, I was three seconds late and Swiss trains wait for no one.

Arriving in Lucerne at midday, in the middle of the week, threw me into the energy of a city dressed to kill and glorying in an Indian summer. Along the shore of inlets and quays of Lake Lucerne, office workers sunned themselves, ladies lunched, dogs walked and wagged and travelling backpackers drifted, dazed by this overwhelmingly attractive city.

There's a lightness of spirit here, nothing too heavy or formal, and the late summer displayed flowers in every receptacle. I trundled my way across the famous, beautifully preserved Kapellbrücke (Chapel Bridge), constructed in the 14th century, and pondered at how well it accommodated the 21st century foot traffic. It continues to display to the world the original 17th century paintings that illustrate scenes of Swiss life, including the histories of a few of the city's patron saints including Leodegar and Mauritius.

I walked towards one of the most elegant hotels I have seen - happy days in my beautiful room at Hotel Des Balances, a chic hotel in the heart of the traffic-free old town.

Out and about to tackle Lucerne by foot, it's not a vast city and small enough to get the gist of the layers of history that unfold as you crisscross from



Lucerne's Jesuitenkirche, or Jesuit Church, which was constructed in 1666 practically floats on water.

The old town still resonates of its mediaeval past and with its intact towers, walls, bridges and old houses, there's a sense of solidarity among the newcomers to the city.

one side of the water to the other. Between coffee, cake, ice cream, lunch and cool drink stops, I explored what's there.

The wondrous Culture and Convention Centre is famed for its amazing acoustics; its architecture is bold and there's a wide, sweeping platform verandah roof jutting out over the front of the building sheltering walkways and cafes. There's a huge pool of water in front of the building and, when it first opened, the architect Jean Nouvel refused to add a railing around the pool as it would 'spoil the aesthetics'. At the opening night's gala event a woman stepped back and fell in the pool. It was the architect's mother. There are now glass walls.

The old town still resonates with its mediaeval past and there's a sense of solidarity among its intact towers, walls, bridges, old houses, and the newcomers to the city – those trendy 17th century upstarts.



THINGS TO DO

Lake cruise, visit: www.lakelucerne.ch
Mountain trip, visit: www.pilatus.ch

Pretty as a picture: Lucerne's Chapel Bridge is dotted with bouquets of brightly coloured flowers for the summer months.

On the lake is where you can see all of what Switzerland is: lakes, mountains, the city, villages, spas, mountain peak activities, lakeside beaches, restaurants in town and by the sea, ski fields, and an unspoilt rugged landscape.

I catch the ferry from Lucerne along the lake to Alpnachstad and, for the thrill of the day, head for the world's steepest cogwheel railway – it's fantastic! You are pulled up almost vertically through the clouds and then the sun shines as we alight after seeing the entire mountain experience of Heidi. Ticking off 2132 metres above sea level, it's time for a cuppa on the Pilatus Kulm peak. Looking around at 73 mountain peaks within photographing distance, I enjoy the strains of an ompah band at the restored hotel on top of the world.

Saturated with sun and A-grade ozone, I headed for the next mode of transport. The aerial cableway began its gentle swoop into the nothingness of a cheeky cloud that wouldn't budge. I left it behind and enjoyed seeing Lake Lucerne and its shoreline perimeters, graded mountain sides, eagles diving and a winding go-cart track going down the mountain.

The airborne finale was in a gondola to Kriens, where I ambled through the suburbs and caught the number one bus back to Lucerne. If you visit only one Swiss city, make it Lucerne. It's all of Switzerland.

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