

## Trip Journal

### Switzerland trip, August 12-19, 2017

This was a trip won as an auction item at Pinewoods in July of 2016 but had only just been scheduled now. Chris Harris (Swiss Chris) had auctioned off a 5 night stay at his place just outside Zürich, plus an included day trip into Zürich with dinner at a local favorite restaurant. We won the trip for \$600 (not including airfare, or lunches, train tickets, and museum admissions) but including dinners at his place, accommodations, drinks, and his services as a personal tour guide. We requested an extra day in order to fly Saturday to Saturday, which saves quite a bit on airfare.

#### Saturday August 12

We arrived very early at Logan airport, and checked in with Swiss Air, who made us check one of our two carry-ons because it weighed 10.5 kilos (limit is 8). Had a light dinner at Vino Volo in Terminal E plus wine flights, then proceeded to our gate, which had already been changed once. We were informed that the aircraft had not yet arrived and we would be delayed 15 minutes. Half an hour later we were informed of another gate change and everyone dashed the length of Terminal E, to find that we were delayed yet again. We took off about 1 hour 15 minutes late and landed in Zürich almost as late. Fortunately it was a direct flight and we didn't have to worry about making a connection.

#### Sunday August 13

We landed about an hour late, at approximately noon local time on Sunday. Chris's instructions on getting the train from the airport and making a connection in Stadelhofen were flawless. The trip took just under an hour and Chris met us at the Jona train station where we made the 7 minute walk to his place. He has a two bedroom condo which is gorgeously furnished and filled with all sorts of treasures. After a brief tour we decided to just hang out, unpack, and get the tour of the apartment, and then drinks (G&Ts) and dinner. Chris had prepared a lasagna which just needed to be heated, along with a salad and a nice bottle of wine. After dinner we had some Jura 16 year old single malt and watched the BBC broadcast of the Prom concert, which was a fabulous performance of the Rachmaninoff 3rd piano concerto. We went to bed early.

#### Monday August 14

Breakfast each day was toast with butter and homemade marmalade, coffee, orange juice, and an assortment of yogurts. Today Chris had an 11:00 doctor's appointment so we decided, after his return, to stay local and make it a short day, since jet lag was still in effect. We drove to the neighboring town of Rapperswil and walked around the town, climbed the hill to the castle (yes, even Rapperswil has a castle!), and while Chris took a short swim in Lake Zürich we wandered the grounds. We had lunch outdoors at Rosenstädter, a lovely restaurant overlooking Lake Zürich and watched the Swiss Rail boats coming and going — that would later be our mode of transportation into Zürich on our included tour. We had the Käseküchen, a quiche-like dish made from a secret recipe of several Swiss cheeses. After lunch we drove up the biggest hill in town (Chris offered us the chance to walk, a 30 minute steep climb on uneven paths, but we opted for the drive), and then climbed the several hundred steps to the top of the Bachtel tower, for one of the best panoramic views of the Alps and near-Alps. We celebrated our climb with ice cream at a local place while admiring the view. Then back to Chris's for drinks, dinner (salmon with a parsley béchamel sauce, a white wine, and then some whisky).

#### Tuesday August 15

Today was our “included” trip to Zürich and dinner out. We had originally planned our day in Luzern for today, but church bells ringing out at dinner the previous evening reminded Chris that the bells signaled a religious holiday on Tuesday, and that the canton of Luzern is a Catholic canton and things would be closed. A quick check confirmed that the glass factory would in fact be closed. Since Zürich is a protestant canton, we switched the itineraries.

We drove into Rapperswil and took the 2 hour boat ride to Zürich along the length of Lake Zürich. The trip was lovely and we were fortunate enough to get a paddlewheel steamer. The boat had a dining cabin, very lovely with paneled walls and a nice menu, and great views of the passing scenery. We had lunch on board and arrived in Zürich at 1:30.

Chris gave us a walking tour that included a visit to the Fraumünster church, which has famous stained glass windows by Marc Chagall. We went on to Grossmünster, the iconic Zürich church with two towers, and climbed to the top of a tower to get fabulous views of the city, Lake Zürich, and the Limmat River.

We climbed up to Lindenhof hill for more fabulous views of the city, then went out in search of Swiss army knives (engraved for free) to bring back as souvenirs. Time for a pre-dinner break, so we had white wine spritzers, then on to dinner.

Dinner was a traditional Swiss meal at the Zeughauskeller, a popular eating spot on the Bahnhofstraße. Dinner was mandated (!) to be their famous kalbgeschnetztes (veal in a cream sauce) with Rösti (large! potato fritter). Then back home, for a whisky tasting — Chris had a sampler of single pour bottles of each of the three new offerings from Glenfiddich, their Cask collection: Select, Reserve, and Vintage. We were not overly impressed and agreed we wouldn't pay the price for any of the three, though we did like the somewhat peaty Vintage the most.

Wednesday August 16

This was our rescheduled Luzern day and Chris decided to drive so that we could stop along the way. Our first stop was at the hermitage in Einseidln — an absolutely breathtaking high baroque church with lavish decorations. After a brief walk around town we got back in his red convertible and drove on to the car ferry that crosses Lake Luzern — a short ride but one with great views of the Alps. From there, it was on to the glass factory at Hergiswil (Glasi). We took their most impressive, animated and somewhat animatronic tour/history lesson, then watched as glass workers blew, shaped and molded various creations out of glass. They were just breaking for lunch, so we did too. We ate at the Glasi-Restaurant Adler, and shared two kinds of schnitzel — Wiener schnitzel, the traditional fried veal, and veal in a mushroom cream sauce.

On to Luzern, where Chris gave us another walking tour. Of course, we started our walk along the Reuss River, with views of the architecture and the famous covered bridge. the Kapellbrücke, built in the 14th century and restored after a fire. The bridge contained hundreds of painted panels, each containing a rhymed couplet (in Swiss German) telling the history of the city. Many of these were destroyed beyond repair in the fire, but 47 were recovered and can be seen as you walk along the length of this famous, flower-decorated bridge across the Reuss River. Our tour continued through the high end shopping district and onto the lion monument, the Lion of Luzern, remembering the deaths of Swiss mercenaries who died in the service of Louis XVI during the French revolution. It is a touching work showing a lion who has been pierced with a spear and has a tear in his eye.

After a quick bit of ice cream at a table overlooking the Kapellbrücke, we headed back home. It was late, so dinner was a cheese omelet and of course the usual collection of drinks and wine.

Thursday August 17

A short day, first a drive to the Rheinfall, the largest waterfall in Europe. Very impressive display of power. They are not as big nor as much of a drop as Niagara, but the falls themselves are more complex with many channels, and it is possible to walk on scaffolding right up to the base of the falls and feel the spray. We walked along one side — the Castle Laufen side — to view the main falls up close, then took a boat ride that went right up to the falls. From there we were on the opposite side and we had lunch at a local cafe with outside tables overlooking the falls. Lunch was sausages and fries, with a local white wine. We explored some of the side falls from this side, then took the boat back.

In the afternoon we drove on to the medieval town of Stein am Rhein, a picture perfect place established in the 11th century, filled with half-timbered houses and quaint squares. We had ice cream and beers in a cafe in the Rathausplatz, right in front of the city hall and surrounded by buildings with magnificent painted facades, and watched the passing scene.

Rush hour traffic in Switzerland is just as bad as it is at home and we took a few wrong turns when Chris's GPS device insisted on trying to take him through a stretch of road that was closed due to construction. We did get a very nice driving tour of some of Switzerland's finest cornfields, however.

Home to drinks, dinner (pasta topped with tomatoes, sausages, garlic and cheese), and drinks.

Friday August 18

Our last day, we had reserved the day for a trip to the capital, Bern, a city dating back to the 12th century. We took the train from Jona, and were met at the station in Bern by Chris's longtime friend and assistant tour guide Louise. What a delightful lady! She has lived all of her adult life in Bern and really knew where to go and what to say. We started by taking a bus to the rose garden (Rosengarten), not so much for the flowers (which were lovely) but the incredible panoramic views looking down onto the city and the Aare River. While we enjoyed the view of this very old city, Louise pointed out various highlights and spoke of its history. We then walked down the hill to the restaurant where we were to have lunch. Casa Novo was delightful if a bit pricey, and our outdoor table overlooked the river. We had a cold potato leek soup and giant prawns prepared oriental style, and an excellent bottle of local white wine. And we watched people jumping off the nearby bridge into the river, which would then carry them downstream at about 3 knots of current. It was a warm day!

Chris had to leave temporarily to run an errand, maintenance on his scuba apparatus at a nearby dive shop, so we continued the walking tour with Louise. She took us down the main street, into the reading room of the university library, and over to the river for some nice views. Then of course we had the mandatory visit to the Zytglogge. We headed back to Louise's apartment for some cold water and ripe melon, and Chris caught up to us there. Of course no visit to anywhere with water would be complete without Chris jumping in, so we walked back to the river and Chris jumped off the second oldest bridge in Bern to float downstream. Finally, Louise walked us back to the train station while we looked at the Zytglogge from behind, and visited some of the famous statues (some 500 years old), including a bagpiper and the child eater of Bern.

We were just in time for the 5:32 train to Zürich but the trip was downright bizarre. First, the train arrived on the dot, we got good seats in the upper level, and then sat and did not depart. After about 10 minutes there was an announcement apologizing for the delay, but that they couldn't find the driver. Another 10 minutes passed and a second announcement that they were still looking for the driver. The train finally departed at 6:00, and was about a half hour late

getting into Zürich. On the way, we heard someone on the PA make an announcement that was full of expletives and cursing the Swiss rail system. Then, muzak came on (Chris assured us they never play music on these trains). No conductor came to check tickets (very unusual on intercity trains), and there were no announcements about the next stop, the dining car, or even welcoming you to the train. Eventually an announcement came over apologizing for the muzak, that one of the passengers had discovered how to access the PA system. Muzak stopped. Then started again 5 minutes later. No announcements about arrival in Zürich or connections. Weird! The weird mood was accompanied with nasty thunderstorms all around us, the first rain we had seen all week. But we had arrived, and made the easy connection the train for Jona.

Home, and dinner, which was pork chops with potatoes and salad, wine, and tonight a taste of Laphroig PX cask, which is a non-exported whisky that is only available in airport duty-free shops. It was delicious, and we vowed to look for it in the Zürich airport the next day (found it, too!).

Saturday August 19

Time to leave! We had our usual breakfast (plus cornflakes) and packed up our stuff. For lunch Chris biked to a local shop and we had several kinds of Swiss cheeses, including a Swiss brie a gruyere, a blue cheese and a chevre, plus several kinds of luncheon meats. All accompanied with wine, of course. Then off to the airport. The return trip home was smooth and uneventful except that Swiss air was once again an hour late. Not sure how the otherwise ultra-precise Swiss have so much trouble with their aircraft.

Overall impressions of the trip

This was a fabulous trip. The scenery (mountains, lakes, cities) was fabulous. The weather was perfect — low 60s in the morning, 80s by afternoon, and sunny. It was made all the more enjoyable by having a host who knew the area so well, and could take us places most tourists don't discover. For example, neither the Rheinfall nor Stein am Rhein were listed in our copy of Rick Steves Switzerland. And having a native for a tour guide make the trip much more relaxing. If you ever get a chance to bid on this auction item at Pinewoods, do so! It is a huge bargain.

Even if you go on your own, Switzerland is an easy place to visit. Most people speak English, and the train system (our one exception notwithstanding) is easy to navigate, with all platforms and trains showing the exact arrival times and names of stops. And the trains run right on time.