

## BURT WOLF

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### TRAVELS & TRADITIONS

### GRAUBUENDEN, SWITZERLAND



The Swiss call their states cantons and Graubunden is the largest. It's located in the southeast corner of the country and includes many of the most famous mountain passes that connect central Europe to Italy. These were the trade routes that controlled commerce for thousands of years.

Mountain passes may no longer be the keys to European commerce but they are still at the center of Graubunden culture and very important to tourists.

#### Sertig Valley and the Walserhuus

The base for my visit was the town of Davos. My first trip out of town was by the high road to the Sertig Valley. From the center of Davos, I took a cable car to the top of Jakobshorn Mountain. The first leg takes you to the station at 6300 feet. A quick change to the second car and up to the top at 8500 feet.



I bid farewell to my loyal Sherpas and began the descent to the valley floor below. Actually, it's just a very pleasant three-hour hike through a dramatic and romantic landscape.

Sertig Dorfli is an isolated mountain village situated at the top of a valley and surrounded by three remarkable peaks—Mittaghorn, Plattenhorn and Ducan. It is also home to the Walserhuus Restaurant—the perfect place to taste the traditional specialties of Graubunden. (Recipes from the Walserhuus begin on page 5.)

#### Taking a Postbus

In 1849 the Swiss government set up the original Swiss Postal Service. It was a highly efficient network based on horse-drawn carriages that carried the mail throughout the nation. But in addition to the mail the post service also carried passengers. By 1913, thousands of horses were pulling thousands of coaches from one end of Switzerland to the other. When the winter snows arrived they switched to horse-drawn sleighs. Almost two million passengers came to consider the postal carriages an essential form of travel.

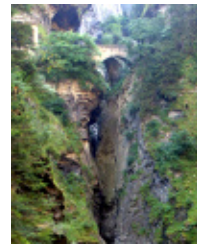


At the end of the First World War the postal service purchased the trucks that had belonged to the military and expanded their service for goods and passengers. They also developed their first Postbus routes, which were designed to take tourists through the most beautiful parts of the Alps.

To make sure that other traffic on the road knew they were about to encounter a postbus on a tight curve, they introduced a distinct three-note horn that is still in use today. C sharp, E and an A major. The tune comes from the overture to the opera "William Tell" by Rossini. Only fitting—William Tell is Switzerland's national folk hero.

Today the Postbus system has over 700 routes that will take travelers through the most beautiful parts of Switzerland. Many of the trips have been designed for tourists and offer specific themes.

#### The Via Mala



My next Postbus ride took me to one of the north-south passes that have been in use since the time of the ancient Romans. It is a stretch of road near the village of Thusis that was once so bad that it came to be known as Via Mala, the Bad Road.

But the word bad is not nearly strong enough to describe this place. You can see the old path running along the side of the mountain. Posts were stuck into the sheer rock face and a narrow balcony hung out over the gorge. People would walk on the wooden planks. Ladies were carried in sedan chairs with covered windows so they couldn't see what was going on.

Nine hundred feet below the water rushes between giant rocks that have fallen from the face of the gorge. Today there is a staircase running from the road to an observation deck and visitors can descend to the base and look at the water as it heads for the Rhine River.

#### The Bernina Express

Another way to see an alpine pass is the Bernina Express. The train makes one of the steepest climbs of any railway. The National Geographic Society picked it as one of the 10 best train rides in the world. If you board the train in the city



of Chur, which is the capital of Graubunden, and get off four hours later in the Poschiavo Valley, you will have traveled through all of Europe's climatic zones. I got on at Pontresina and reserved a seat in one of the panoramic cars. The windows run up into the roof and give

you a great view of the surrounding mountains.

You might also get a look at a local herd of ibex. The ibex is the official mascot of Graubunden and if you don't see one on the pass you can always see one on the cantonal flag.



On the other side of the valley is the Piz Bernina, the canton's highest peak—13,280 feet above sea level. The highest point on the rail line is the Bernina Pass—7,381 feet above sea level. The waters that melt down from the glacier flow in two different directions. On the south side they run down into Italy's Po River and out into the Adriatic Sea. The waters on the north side flow into the Danube and then to the Black Sea.

At the Alp Grum station, you get a clear view of the Palu Glacier. At this point the train begins a slow descent to the valley of Poschiavo, which is in the part of Switzerland that speaks Italian. The climate and the culture are clearly Mediterranean.



When the train leaves Poschiavo it travels along the local street and stops at the little town of Le Prese which is where I got off to have a drink at the Hotel Le Prese. Their terrace looks out on Lake Poschiavo.

Lunch was just next door at the Ristorante Giardino. Local specialties include trout from the lake, buckwheat pasta with potatoes, garlic and onions and wine from Nebbiolo grapes.

After lunch I walked through the Poschiavo town square, stopped for an espresso and headed back up into the mountains.

## Alphorns and Yodelers

Switzerland has very sophisticated communication systems. Even at the top of the Alps I could flip out a tri-band Motorola cell phone and use its voice-activated technology to call my grandson in the US. But alpine communication was not always based on voice-activated telephones. For hundreds of years it was just voice activated and it came in two forms—local and long distance.

The technology for the long distance system was the alphorn. It's a straight twelve-foot piece of carved or bored wood that's overwound with birch bark. For hundreds of years, Alpine herdsman and villag-



## How to Go

### SWISS PASS

1-877-456-RAIL

[WWW.RAILEUROPE.COM](http://WWW.RAILEUROPE.COM)



The Swiss Pass entitles you to unrestricted travel by rail, bus and boat on the Swiss Travel System network for 4, 8, 15 or 21 days or a full month. Also included are trams and buses in 36 towns and cities as well as discount fares on many mountain railways and cable cars.

### THE POSTBUS (POSTAUTO)



I think the best way to see Switzerland is on one of the post buses that run throughout the country. You don't have to worry about which roads to take, or keeping to a tight schedule. Just relax and enjoy the scenery.

Information about the Postbus system is available in English at [USA.MYSWITZERLAND.COM](http://USA.MYSWITZERLAND.COM) and in French, Italian and German at [WWW.POST.CH](http://WWW.POST.CH).

### THE BERNINA EXPRESS



C/O RHÄTISCHE BAHN  
 BAHNHOFSTRASSE 25  
 CH-7002 CHUR, SWITZERLAND  
 TEL: +41 (0) 81 288 61 04  
 FAX: +41 (0) 81 288 61 05  
[WWW.RHB.CH](http://WWW.RHB.CH)

## THINGS TO DO

### THE SWISS NATIONAL PARK

CH-7530 ZERNEZ, SWITZERLAND  
TEL: +41 (0) 81 856 12 82  
FAX: +41 (0) 81 856 17 40  
[WWW.NATIONALPARK.CH](http://WWW.NATIONALPARK.CH)

### THE WHISKEY BAR AT HOTEL WALDHAUS

CH-7514 SILS-MARIA  
TEL: +41 (0) 81 838 51 00  
FAX: +41 (0) 81 838 51 98  
E-MAIL: [MAIL@WALDHAUS-SILS.CH](mailto:MAIL@WALDHAUS-SILS.CH)  
[WWW.WALDHAUS-SILS.CH](http://WWW.WALDHAUS-SILS.CH)

## WHERE TO EAT

### GENTIANA BISTRO

PROMENADE 53  
CH-7270 DAVOS PLATZ, SWITZERLAND  
TEL: +41 (0) 81 413 56 49  
FAX: +41 (0) 81 413 49 19

### RISTORANTE GIARDINO

CH-7746 LE PRESE, SWITZERLAND  
TEL: +41 (0) 81 844 03 83  
FAX: +41 (0) 81 844 10 33

### WALSERHUUS RESTAURANT

7272 DAVOS SERTIG, SWITZERLAND  
TEL: +41 (0) 81 410 60 30  
FAX: +41 (0) 81 410 60 35  
E-MAIL: [WALSERHUUS@SWISSONLINE.CH](mailto:WALSERHUUS@SWISSONLINE.CH)  
[WWW.WALSERHUUS.CH](http://WWW.WALSERHUUS.CH)

## TO LEARN MORE

### SWITZERLAND TOURISM

TOLL-FREE: 1-877-794-8037  
[WWW.MYSWITZERLAND.COM](http://WWW.MYSWITZERLAND.COM)

### GRAUBÜNDEN TOURISM

ALEXANDERSTRASSE 24  
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TEL: +41 (0) 81 254 24 24  
FAX: +41 (0) 81 254 24 00  
E-MAIL: [CONTACT@GRAUBUENDEN.CH](mailto:CONTACT@GRAUBUENDEN.CH)  
[WWW.GRAUBUENDEN.CH](http://WWW.GRAUBUENDEN.CH)

ers have used the alphorn to send messages. It has a natural tone range of 13 notes that can carry for a distance of over 5 miles. Each combination of notes has a special meaning.

The alphorn was used for long distance communication, but if you wanted to make a local call you just yodeled. Yodeling is a type of singing in which you quickly alternate falsetto and low chest notes. No one is sure how it got started but there are a number of interesting theories. Some people believe that it is an Alpine variation of the Gregorian chant. Others hold that it is an imitation of the alphorn. The story I like the best is that it is the mating call of the alpine herder for the milkmaid.

If you like the yodeling sound and would like to learn how to yodel, believe it or not, there is a yodeling course on the internet at [WWW.YODELCOURSE.COM](http://WWW.YODELCOURSE.COM). When you have successfully completed the ten-lesson course you get a Certificate of Yodelology that's suitable for framing. And remember yodeling is not just something you'll use in Switzerland. Yodeling is part of the musical culture of Austria, the Pygmy communities of Africa, China, and the American West—yes sirree, cowboys yodel. You'll get to use your yodeling skills a lot more than you might have thought.



### St. Moritz



But if you don't want to think about yodeling, then how about St. Moritz. Most people who think about St. Moritz think that it's the ultimate winter resort for the rich and famous. And that's probably true. It was built on the south side of an alpine mountain that gets 322 days of sun each year.

As a matter of fact it is the sunniest city in Switzerland. Its fame as a resort goes back over a thousand years. During the Middle Ages people came here to sit in the healing waters of its mineral springs. In 1519 Pope Leo X promised full absolution to every Christian who came to the spa, under the theory that cleanliness is next to godliness.

During the middle of the 1800s, St. Moritz was a summer resort and very popular with English tourists. Johannes Badrutt, owner of the Kulm Hotel, thought that his guests were missing half the fun by not being here during the winter. So he made a bet with some of his English visitors, inviting them for the winter season and promising to cover all their costs if they didn't love it. St. Moritz has never been the same.

### The World's Largest Whisky Bar

St. Moritz may hold a record for fun in the sun but that's just one of its records. In 1998 *The Guinness Book of Records* stopped in to the Hotel Waldhaus and decided that it contained "The World's Largest Whisky Bar." Clearly they were not

## WHERE TO STAY

While I was in Davos I stayed at the Steigenberger Belvédère, which is the only five-star hotel in Davos. It opened in 1875 and was the first hotel that was not built as a sanatorium for people trying to recover from an illness.

Instead the Belvédère was designed for visitors who were interested in having a good time, and that is still the central theme here. It has the old world charm of a hotel that has been around for over a century but it also has the things that a modern traveler enjoys. In 1980, the Steigenberger hotel group purchased the property and spent a small fortune bringing it into the 21st century.



### STEIGENBERGER BELVÉDÈRE

PROMENADE 89  
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TEL: +41 (0) 81 41 560 00  
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talking about the physical size of the place. If you wanted to get more than 25 people in it you'd have to start layering. What they must have had in mind was the selection. The walls of the bar are lined with roughly 2,500 different whiskeys that have been methodically arranged by nationality and distillery using the Dewey Dram system.

A dram, by the way, is not a precise unit of measurement like an ounce or a cup. It's whatever the pourer wants to pour. So a wee-dram is only wee in the eyes of the beholder. And there is much to behold at Hotel Waldhaus. They have 160 different Macallans ranging from 1878 to the present, 52 Springbanks, and 36 Bowmores. If you don't see what you'd like on the shelf there's a back up stock in the cellar. But should you be wondering why a bar with the world's largest selection of whiskeys is in St. Moritz, allow me to remind you that the British were the first tourists to Switzerland and they liked a wee dram to remind them of home or a not so wee dram to forget it.

## The Lower Engadine

St. Moritz is in a part of Switzerland known as the Upper Engadine. Its culture is modern, chic and international. But a fifteen-minute drive from St. Moritz will take you to the lower Engadine and the town of Zuoz.

Zuoz is a center of Romansch culture, which dates back to the year 15 BC when Roman troops marched into the area and started keeping house so they could keep out any invaders who might try to keep house in Rome. They also speak the fourth official language of Switzerland called Romansch, which is based on ancient Latin.

The town itself is filled with buildings that are perfect examples of Engadine architecture. The houses feature big wooden entryways with a bench out front which acts as an extension of the family room. Bay windows allow you to see what is going on in the streets



without leaving the comfort of your home. Decorative designs called *scraffito* are etched into the walls of the houses.

## Davos

During the second half of the 1800s the most popular way to treat any form of upper respiratory illness was to head up into the Swiss Alps and cure yourself by resting. You sat out in the sun, breathed the fresh air, and sometimes you got well. And sometimes you didn't.

The most important Swiss town for the rest cure was Davos—the ultimate resort for the unhealthy wealthy. For seventy years helping people get well or helping them think they were getting well was the local industry. But during the 1930s doctors developed more effective cures and Davos had to readjust its focus.

Surely the clean environment, fresh air, and natural beauty, could be used for more than sanatoriums and within a decade Davos turned itself into a center for mountain sports.

The dry, dust free air with its low pollen content still helps thousands of allergy and asthma sufferers but these days Davos is about skiing and sledding in the winter and hiking in the summer.



## The Swiss National Park

For centuries the mountain ranges of Graubünden were subject to mining, deforestation, over-grazing and over-hunting. In 1914 the Swiss Federal Government established The Swiss National Park to put an end to those abuses and to save the land for future generations. The Park's founding fathers included scientists who wanted the area to run its natural course and to study its evolution. Today its 65 square miles are tightly controlled and protected. Twenty-three lakes, many rare plants and animals, and untouched forests offer visitors a look at Switzerland's most natural natural beauty.



## TRAVELS & TRADITIONS

RECIPES FROM

### GRAUBUNDEN, SWITZERLAND



#### CAPUNS

Makes 12 Capuns

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 whole large egg, lightly beaten
- 1 large egg yolk
- 1 tablespoon milk
- ¼ cup finely chopped pancetta
- ¼ cup finely chopped prociutto
- ¼ cup finely chopped Landjäger sausage, or other dry cured beef sausage.
- ¼ cup chopped fresh mint
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 12 young leaves of Swiss chard or beet greens, ribs trimmed from leaves
- 1 cup grated Gruyere cheese
- 1/3 cup melted unsalted butter

Place the flour in a bowl and make a well in the center. Pour the egg, egg yolk, and milk into the well and stir with your fingers until a dough begins to form. Knead the dough with your hands in the bowl, then turn out onto a lightly floured board. Knead the dough until it is smooth. The dough will be stiff and firm. Set the dough aside to rest in a bowl covered with a damp towel for 30 minutes.

Add the pancetta, prosciutto, sausage, mint, and parsley to the bowl of dough. Knead with your hands to incorporate the ingredients into the dough. Season the dough to taste with salt and pepper, being careful with the addition of salt, as the pancetta and prosciutto can be salty.

To assemble the capuns, lay one leaf of the chard on a clean cutting board with the stem side of the leaf towards you. Place 1 tablespoon of the meat dough on the bottom third of the leaf. Roll the leaf over the dough, fold in the sides, and continue rolling up until you reach the top of the leaf. Continue this process with the remaining dough and leaves. If you are finding it too difficult to roll

the leaves without damaging them, blanch the leaves in boiling water to make them more pliable, then proceed with the rolling.

Bring ½-inch of lightly salted water in a large deep skillet to a boil over high heat. Add the capuns, seam side down, into the boiling water. Cover the skillet, reduce the heat to medium, and simmer for 15 minutes.

To finish the dish, lift the capuns out of the poaching liquid, draining the excess liquid and place them on a platter. Sprinkle the cheese evenly over the capuns and pour the hot butter over the cheese. Serve hot.



#### WALSERHUUS RESTAURANT

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I started my meal with a plate of *bundnerfleisch*—translucent slices of air-dried beef. To make this specialty, pieces of meat are marinated in herbs, pressed between wooden planks to give them a brick-like shape, dried in the open mountain air and shaved into thin slices that are almost fat free.

The second course was a bowl of thick *Gerstensuppe* made from barley and vegetables. The main courses to try are *Maluns*—grated potatoes sautéed in butter until they form a crisp cake and served with cream and local cheeses and *Capuns*—ground meat dumplings wrapped in leaves of Swiss chard and served with grated cheese and melted butter.

## BARLEY SOUP

*Gerstenzuppe*

*Makes 6 servings*

*½ cup barley*  
*2 tablespoons unsalted butter*  
*½ cup julienned leek*  
*½ cup julienned cabbage*  
*½ cup diced carrot*  
*½ cup diced celery root*  
*7 cups cold water*  
*4-ounce piece salt pork*  
*4-ounce piece bacon*  
*2-ounce piece smoked beef brisket (optional)*  
*½ cup diced potato*  
*3 tablespoons heavy cream*  
*Salt*  
*Freshly ground black pepper*

Soak the barley overnight, changing the water once. Drain the barley and set aside.

In a medium pot, melt the butter and sauté the leeks, cabbage, carrot, and celery root over medium heat about 10 minutes or until vegetables are soft. Add the pork and beef, if using, and water, and increase the heat to high. Bring the soup to a boil, reduce the heat to medium-low, and simmer until the meats are soft and the soup has thickened, 1½ to 2 hours.

Add the potato to the soup and continue cooking until the potato is cooked through. Stir in the heavy cream and adjust the seasoning of the soup with the salt and pepper to taste, and cook 5 minutes more. Remove and discard the meats before serving the soup.

## MALUNS

*Makes 4 to 6 servings*

*2 pounds russet potatoes (about 2 large)*  
*¾ cup all-purpose flour*  
*2 teaspoons salt*  
*12 tablespoons unsalted butter*

In a large saucepan, cover the potatoes with cold water and bring to a boil over high heat. Cook until the potatoes are half way cooked through, about 10 minutes. Drain the potatoes and peel them while they are still warm. Set the potatoes aside to cool completely, then refrigerate overnight. Completely cooling the potatoes will make them easier to cut and grate.

Thinly slice half of the potatoes and put them into a large bowl. Grate the remaining potato on the large holes of a grater and add them to the bowl. Add the flour and salt to the potatoes and mix until well combined.

In a large nonstick skillet, melt 6 tablespoons of the butter over medium heat, and add the potatoes. Stir the potatoes constantly for 5 minutes. Reduce the temperature to medium-low and continue cooking the potatoes, stirring occasionally and adding 1 tablespoon butter every 5 minutes. Once all of the butter has been added, do not stir the potatoes until a golden and crispy potato pancake has formed, about 10 minutes more.

