

A scenic view of a Swiss lake with mountains in the background and a boat docked at a pier in the foreground. The water is a vibrant blue-green, and the mountains are covered in greenery with some snow-capped peaks. A white boat is docked at a wooden pier in the foreground, and a larger white boat is partially visible on the left. The sky is clear and blue.

# Switzerland: jump in this train!

From 22 to 24 March, the Switzerland Convention & Incentive Bureau and the Lucerne Convention Bureau invited eight travel & event agents from Belgium to go on a study trip to learn more about the MICE opportunities in Lucerne and Andermatt. They visited the favourite region of German writer Goethe, growing today as a year-round destination. Among them was Viviane Vaz, freelance journalist and communications manager at the Belgian travel & event agency Id International.

**Text by Viviane Vaz**  
[www.bbtonline.eu](http://www.bbtonline.eu)





**H**ave you always had the impression nothing can go wrong in Switzerland? On the study trip to Lucerne and Andermatt, my impressions were confirmed once more. We left Brussels airport to Zurich on time, in a beautiful **Swiss** plane full of brand new design seats. By the time you finish drinking your coffee, reading your newspaper and concluding your company's report... bam! You are already landing in Zurich airport.

Less than a ten-minute walk from the plane to the baggage area... surprise, surprise: no need to wait for ages, our suitcases were already there, waiting for us at the conveyor belt. How is it possible? These Swiss people must have an internal biological clock completely different from the rest of the world. How do they do that?

This must have been great specially to **Myriam Winnepenninckx, Switzerland Convention & Incentive**

**Bureau** MICE Manager in Belgium, since the first thing she planned was to get rid of all our big luggage and set us free. Do you know you can send all your luggage to any place in Switzerland by train? That's what she did with our suitcases. You just need to tag your luggage well and drop it at a special shop in the Zurich train station, a short walk from the airport, and it's done. Some of my colleagues did not even bother to lock their backpacks. Then, while we were taking the train from Zurich to Lucerne, our luggage was travelling by a train courier service straight to Andermatt, our final destination.

In less than one hour, our group was in the centre of Lucerne. We arrived earlier, so even had time to have an extra breakfast at **Luz Seebistro**, a cosy spot facing lake Lucerne. Then it was time to start our tour with Heidi Muffler, who knew her hometown as the back of her hand.

### Swiss leading light

Today Lucerne is a beautiful small city in the heart of Switzerland and can serve as a great base to explore the inner regions of the country. It was founded before the year 1200 and the origins of its name are not clear. It is either derived from Luciarina, an old word for weir-basket, indicating the start of Lucerne as a fishermen's village. Or it came from the Latin word Lucerna: oil-lamp or circle of light. One thing is certain: the light of Lucerne led the way to start what we know today as Switzerland. It was the first city to join the Swiss Confederation and to attract curious tourists already in 1840, when the term tourism was not even invented yet.

Many Grand Hotels were built in this period and we had lunch in a very representative one: **Hotel Schweizerhof**. After enjoying the menu à la carte provided by the restaurant Galerie in this 5-star hotel, it was time to

do the site inspection with Roman Omlin, director of Business Development.

Hotel Schweizerhof offers more than 170 years of tradition and it houses nine rooms bathed in natural light for all types of meetings. Major events are regularly held there, such as the Blue Balls Festival, Lucerne Blues Festival and The Retro Festival.

I should warn you now, if you don't want to read my spoiler about this property, please jump to the next paragraph. I have to say that even if historical hotels are not your thing, Schweizerhof will win you by surprise. When you first enter it, you face glamorous 19th century decorated common areas. However, when you walk into one of the 101 rooms and suites, you find unexpected spacious rooms matching poppy colours with cosy and creative furniture. Moreover, each room is dedicated to personalities such as kings, writers,





politicians and artists who stayed there. The Belgian crowd might be interested to know there's a room named under King Leopold. We had no chance to have a closer look at it though, since a guest was still there enjoying his festival hotel room.

The Lucerne of today also offers professional event management know-how. Besides a first-class infrastructure and wide choice of hotels, we can find multipurpose conferencing centres, such as the **KKL Lucerne**. The venue is located in front of Lake Lucerne and next to the international train station designed by Santiago Calatrava. The old town can be reached via the famous Chapel Bridge and the Water Tower.

The KKL Lucerne was created as an architectural vision of Jean Nouvel and the acoustics were designed by Russell Johnson. It offers different rooms that can be privatized for events, including the main concert hall. This room was made to delight musicians and audiences with a soft, round acoustic sound. The walls are nicely decorated with more than 24,000 white square plaster reliefs that are each 20cm in length. The textured plastered surfaces break the sound reflection

and distributes it in all directions. Above, in the black roof, little white lights give you the feeling of a starry night sky.

#### Train Spotting

In the afternoon we were transported to Switzerland's most-visited museum: the **Swiss Museum of Transport**. "Swiss people come here at least three times in their lives. When we are a child, our parents bring us here to play; when we are adults, we bring our children to play and then when we are old, it's time to bring the grandchildren," explains us Céline Meyer, Lucerne Tourism & Convention Bureau marketing manager.

The museum hosts Switzerland's first diesel locomotive, 30 aircraft and the Auto theatre, an attraction where a fleet of cars from all eras are stacked six-high on shelves as if they were toys. But there's also Switzerland's first IMAX theatre, a newly updated planetarium and even a new adventure for chocoholics supported by Lindt Chocolate Competence Foundation.





The place is huge and offers all kinds of meetings and events possibilities. You could make your guests dine under aeroplanes, and next to trains or spaceships. The external area is also very welcoming for teambuilding activities... Here, sky is really the limit.

#### Towards Andermatt

Going from Lucerne to Andermatt is quite a smooth trip and it takes just 30 minutes. Our driver knew his way and surfed the curves of the road as if they were straight lines. The village is located in the Ursern Valley in the Swiss Alps and was considered "the dearest and most interesting" place of all to German writer Goethe. I enjoyed seeing nature change from the blue lake view to the mountain region, enclosed by sheer granite walls, passing by several spectacular bridges and tunnels.

The most famous one is a stone bridge known as the Teufelsbrücke: the "Devil's Bridge". The legend tells us how witty the Swiss people can be. Nobody dared to build the bridge in such a difficult place, so the people of Uri recruited the devil to do it. As payment, the devil wanted to receive the first living being to cross the bridge. But the Swiss people were smart. Instead of sending a man to go across the bridge, they sent a goat. Enraged at having been tricked, the devil wanted to throw a large rock to smash the bridge. However, a holy man came to help the Swiss and forced the devil



to drop the rock, which could still be seen on the path below Göschenen...

Today, the 1,500 inhabitants of Andermatt have no need to worry about infrastructure, neither appeal to supernatural forces. We can easily get there by car or train. The town has the enchanting atmosphere of a mountain village with apartment buildings, hotels and chalets, besides the Ski Arena and even a 18-hole Scotland-inspired golf course. A cable car offers access to the Gemsstock ski area and a chairlift links the village with Nätschen's slopes.

We stayed at the new **Radisson Blu Hotel Reussen Andermatt**, an investment in the light of Andermatt's growing status as a year-round destination. The 4-star superior hotel offers 179 spacious rooms and 45 rented suites and apartments. Designed in the typical Swiss chalet style, it uses natural materials to create a warm ambiance, without forgetting the new trends in technology. All areas offer free high-speed internet, LED televisions and 24-hour room service. There is an open lobby lounge with a bar and a cosy fireplace, ideal to relax and chat to your colleagues.

The hotel also offers great infrastructure for business and private events. In addition to six well-equipped modern meeting rooms and boardrooms, Radisson's Sales Manager Timo Oelke showed us their best kept







secret. We took a look at the construction of their large, multifunctional concert hall with seating for up to 700 guests which is scheduled to be open already this Spring.

My colleagues and I also enjoyed eating at the **Spun Restaurant**, with a good variety of fresh local market food and Italian-inspired creations. During the day, we checked the incentive possibilities at the fantastic Ski arena and then took a train to have lunch at the **Piz Calmot Restaurant**. There you can feel the original spirit of the Swiss Alps and taste the water straight from the Berg.

After skiing or snow hiking, you can decide to relax your muscles in the exclusive Radisson Blue's spa and wellness area going for a sauna, steam bath or a customized treatment. If you still have the energy, you can also go for a swim in the 25-meter pool. In my case, I simply enjoyed myself floating in the warm water and admiring the panoramic view.

#### Asia in the Alps

For dinner, we headed to the **Chedi Andermatt Hotel**,

a unique mix of alpine chic chalet-style on the outside and Asian temple design inside. If you also want to bring your MICE clients, you can choose the either Japanese restaurant or The Restaurant, which offers the best of two worlds: both Swiss and Asian cuisines. The latter faces a particular five-meter-high glass cheese cellar. There is also a wine cave, where you can toast with some acclaimed vintage such as from Château Mouton-Rothschild.

Before tasting thoughtful Asian delicacies, we went on a site inspection led by sales manager Maria Roström to have a glimpse of the 123 elegant rooms, suites and seminar facilities. In the 5-star hotel we could see how guests are fond of some special areas as the Wine & Cigar Library; the Ski Living Room, dedicated to skiers; and the modern health club with spa area.

#### Lunch on the lake

Our last morning was dedicated to enjoying the sunshine on Lake Lucerne and its beautiful landscapes. The Swiss travel system provides a unique all-in-one-ticket solution, enabling us to travel all through Switzerland by train, tram, bus and boat, also including







Switzerland Meeting & Convention Bureau



**Switzerland.**

For more info on Switzerland as a MICE Destination, check out:

[www.MySwitzerland.com/meetings](http://www.MySwitzerland.com/meetings).

Your contact in Belgium is Myriam Winnepenninckx - Manager Meetings & Incentives Switzerland Convention & Incentive Bureau/Switzerland Tourism

Telephone: +32 (0)2 345 83 57

E-Mail: [myriam.winnepenninckx@switzerland.com](mailto:myriam.winnepenninckx@switzerland.com)



scenic routes and free admission to more than 470 museums.

So, from Andermatt we got a shuttle to Brunnen, where we could easily jump into a boat for a tour including first class lunch. After the boat trip experience, we took the train from Brunnen to Zurich airport, with a change in Zug station. For me, it was time to practice my new skills of jumping trains quickly. I said in the beginning of this article nothing can go wrong in Switzerland. Actually, I discovered one thing: you may lose your sharpness by admiring the landscape and miss your perfectly scheduled train! Imagine the situation. You are standing in the train station, ahead on time, and suddenly you see the train doors closing right in front of your nose. How come?

How can you miss your train like that? Either you were too slow to keep up with Swiss pace or you were daydreaming. Or both. It happened to me and some of my colleagues on the trip on the way back from lunch at Calmot to Radisson hotel. We didn't hear any train sign of doors closing and we were too slow to jump in.

Next time, be ready. It's hup hup. As soon as the doors open, jump in the train quickly. In fact, it is the perfect metaphor for this destination. If you have the chance to take your people to Switzerland, don't think twice. Jump in the train without hesitation.

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