

SWISS TREASURES

SP travels to Switzerland's Lake Geneva region



The medieval town of Gruyères



Lake Geneva



Dining at Lausanne Palace & Spa

TOP RIGHT AND BOTTOM RIGHT: LAUSANNE PALACE AND SPA; LEFT: LA GRUYERE TOURISM

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

I'd been told that the trains in Switzerland are excellent. During a recent visit, I found it's true that trains make it easy to travel from place to place and arrive on time. But there's one problem: The views out the windows on both sides of a Swiss train are so spectacular and often so different—perhaps a lake on one side, mountains on the other—that it's difficult to decide which way to face, yet it's impossible to look out both windows at once.

Buy a Swiss Pass and you get more than a ticket to ride past stunning vistas: Switzerland's public transportation system is a fine-tuned network of trains, buses, boats and trams that can get you anywhere you want to go. From the airport to the mountaintop, city to city, across lakes and through valleys, you won't need a rental car (and probably not a taxicab either).

Switzerland is a small, landlocked country bordered by France on the west, Germany on the north, Austria and Liechtenstein on the east and Italy on the south. I visited the French-speaking Lake Geneva region in the southwest part of the country.

After flying into Geneva, the country's second-largest city, I hopped aboard a

train to Lausanne and then climbed up a steep hill to the Lausanne Palace & Spa; had I known about the outdoor public elevator, I could have skipped dragging my suitcase up the cobblestone incline. I spent only two nights at the hotel, but in that short time it earned the No. 1 spot on my list of personal favorite hotels in the world. It impressed on every level, from customer service to room amenities, décor style to onsite facilities. My spacious room opened onto a grand terrace with amazing views of the town, Lake Geneva and Alps foothills. After a soak in the deep tub, I slipped into a plush robe and slippers, bit

into a complimentary apple, tested the room's technology—including free Wi-Fi, automatic window shades and convenient bedside light switches—and sank into the cozy bed.

But restful sleep was just a small factor in my busy six-day itinerary. Among the highlights:

- The Lavaux Vineyard Terraces stretch about 18 miles along Lake Geneva's north shore from Chateau de Chillon to eastern Lausanne. Designated an UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2007, the terraces can be traced back to 11th century Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries. Hiking in the area is a physical challenge that offers amazing visual rewards.

- The Olympic Museum in Ouchy, the second most-visited museum in Switzerland, celebrates the link between sport, art and culture through interactive exhibits, documents, films and collections dating from Greek antiquity to modern times. An adjacent park houses several works of art with sporting themes ranging from whimsical to inspirational.

- The Roman Museum in Nyon, which was once considered the Roman Empire's most important colony in Switzerland, displays artifacts dating from as early as 45 B.C. While the placards are all French, the ancient self-explanatory objects impress.

- The charming medieval town of Gruyères boasts historic treasures like a castle that housed 19 counts from the 11th to 16th centuries, a prisoner's tower, garrison walls and a house once belonging to a court jester.

- The H.R. Giger Museum in Gruyères showcases the most extensive collection of artwork by the Swiss artist awarded an Oscar for visual effects for his design work on the movie "Alien." Permanent exhibits include Giger's designs for the films "Alien," "Alien 3," "Dune," "Species," "Poltergeist II" and "The Mystery of San Gottardo." Across the road is the museum's companion bar; stepping into it feels like being swallowed by a creature, since the walls appear to be arching vertebrae.

- Geneva's Old Town district is filled with art galleries, antique shops and boutiques. Even more upscale shops are nearby along Rue du Rhône, Rue de la Confédération and Rue du Marché. Watches and chocolate are most prized, but designer clothing, jewelry, shoes and art also dazzle.

With its gorgeous landscapes, delicious regional cuisine, cowbells tinkling across the countryside, gentle breezes dancing between the lake and Alps, and the scent of cocoa drifting from shop doorways, Switzerland's Lake Geneva region leaves lasting memories. **SP**

IF YOU GO

GETTING THERE

- **Swiss International Air Lines**
www.swiss.com
- **Swiss Travel System**
www.swisstravelsystem.ch

WHERE TO STAY

- **Lausanne Palace & Spa**
www.lausanne-palace.ch

MORE INFORMATION

- **Lake Geneva Region Tourism**
www.lake-geneva-region.ch
- **Switzerland Tourism**
www.myswitzerland.com