

The Secret Side of Grindelwald, Switzerland

By Peggy Newland

If you could find a perfect Swiss mountainside retreat, it would be the Hotel Fiescherblick, which is situated in a quiet nook of Grindelwald—land of the magic mountains that rise like broken teeth on all sides. Fiescherblick literally translates to Fiescher -view and this gem is perched directly across from the peaks. Each room has a deck overlooking Mittelhorn, Grossen Scheidegg, Bussalp Valley, Schreckhorn, and the distant Eiger and Jungfrau. Late spring, there's the melodic cowbells of munching

wine pairings, and you'll never want to leave.

The first morning, after a made-to-order breakfast, fresh yogurt and granola, and plenty of cappuccinos, we head down country lanes past flower-boxed Swiss chalets, rushing streams, and pastures full of cows making echoing bell symphonies. We follow well marked paths toward Pfingstegg and are surrounded by deep spruce forest, glens of crocus, cherry blossom, narcissus, trollblum, and vistas by the bag-full. From Marmorbruchstrasse, we feel very athletic hiking part of the Eiger Ultra Trail that winds beneath the craggy, snow-covered peaks. Eventually we dip down along Unterhausernweg and then up into nooks and crannies of Bodmi Ski Area. We are bundled up from the mist and drizzle when we find the funky, artfully wooden Café 3692 for homemade bread, turnip soup, banana bread, and hot tea. Then it's all downhill to the panoramic sauna and hot tub before dinner.

That night we treat ourselves to a kaleidoscope of cuisine, presented with phantastic plating. Brian and I stare at each beautiful arrangement of inventiveness. Think French culinary expertise mixed with sculp-

tures of regional produce and add perfect pairings of wines and you've got an evening to remember. Each course flows seamlessly under the expertise of Aurelien Mettler.

We start with the first course: green asparagus tips, onion relish, sorell-apple sauce and the most delightful asparagus ice cream, paired 2022 Riesling by Van Volxem, and then jump into second course: rabbit ballotine, peas, morils, goyoza with rabbit consume vin jaune sauce, paired with 2016 Vin Jaune Generation 9 by Baud and even a third course: perch filet, alpine dashi, buckwheat risotto, alp cheese with paired 2022 Rose by Keller am See. Then it's an intermediate course of ravioli del plin before the main course: beef entrecote, swiss chard, beef jus-terrine paired with 2016 Barolo Stra by Ciocchini Loschietto. As we relax into the night, the cuisine continues with a cheese course: arve from Wagistal by Bruino Apert, 2024 alp cheese from Bussalp by Simon Meyer, and a 2020 alp cheese from Bussalp by Andreas Michel, paired with a 15-year Colheita Sercial Madeira by Henriques & Henriques. But it's not over yet: we get a pre-dessert: corn cremeux, honey ice cream, with dandelion syrup and then the dessert: lait ribo sorbet, rhubarb, Szechuan pepper, paired with a 2018 Brannland Iscider 34.

Our taste buds are so happy.

The next morning, we head over to Mannlichen to hike over to Kleine Scheidegg, which is an alpine valley just below the Monch, Eiger, and Jungfrau ranges. High above us, in the clouds, we hear the rumble of avalanches, as we hike on empty paths on this overcast day. A fox zips across the path. We note the snowline closing off some trails as we hike along waterfalls filled with snowmelt. Clouds surround us and there's a hush. "It's an adventure," I say,

as we pull on wool hats. We hike along the Alpighen Path as we hear the distant whistle of a train on the cog railway above us, and feel small, surrounded on all sides, by the stormy peaks. We eventually find the Berghaus Alpighen where we enjoy some hot soup, bratwurst, and pilsners, by a warming stove, before continuing back down to Grindelwald and the hotel for the sauna and hot tub.

That night, we dine at Matthias' parents' place, Hotel Gletschergarten, which is located right next door to Hotel Fiescherblick. In the family since 1899, for four generations, Matthias' parents, Gaby and Gery Michel, welcome us for a dinner of classic alpine fare. Fresh salads, lamb chops, mashed potatoes, and sauteed spring greens. We sit by candlelight overlooking a ravine lit up pink from sunset as we enjoy our strawberry cobbler with ice cream for dessert.

Gery tells us that Gaby's great grandfather was an artist, and we notice that many of his paintings fill the hallways and dining rooms. The "first beginnings" of the hotel, in the early 1900's, included a cafeteria with "set up" cups of coffee, beds rented for "around one franc," and food was "packaged in boxes covered in fabric." Gery is a man with stories and worked as a mechanic at the Jungfrau Railways. We hear of the Eiger Express that zips folks up to a cog railway that chugs to the Jungfrauoch, "3454 meters above sea level."

After dinner, Gaby shows us the quaint bar, with woodstove, and cushioned seats close by for warmth. She shares antique "lodger" records.

"Hermann Hesse stayed here," Gaby says, showing me his signature. "Many notable guests from the late 1800's and 1900's. Movie stars, too."

We rise early the next morning so we can spend the day at the "top of Eu-



rope"—the Jungfrauoch. The Eiger Express hauls us quickly past Kleine Scheidegg and then we're on the classic cog railway train hoofing up through tunnels until we arrive at this UNESCO World Heritage Site to take an elevator to "the sphinx"—a panoramic terrace with views of the Mittelland up to the Vosges and over the longest glacier in the Alps. We are breathless at this altitude and with these vistas. It's a winter wonderland of undulating peaks in all directions. The sky is brilliant blue up here, while below, Grindelwald, is encased in clouds. A black Alpine Chough caeens above, soaring in the winds off the cliffs and ravines. It perches on a railing

and seems to contemplate the view before gliding down to the snow field.

We eat a late lunch at Crystal—a Swiss inspired restaurant suspended over the ledges, and it's like we are floating in the clouds while we enjoy potato leek soup, fresh breads, and local cheeses and beers. A chocolate plate rounds out the experience as we watch an avalanche explode down a cliff line.

That night, under the stars, in the hot tub, back at Hotel Fiescherblick, we watch as the moon rises, sending lit shadows over the alpine meadows and ravines. Cow bells ring in the distance. It's a moment of perfect place in the Swiss Alps during spring.

if you go

Hotel & Restaurant Fiescherblick. www.hotel-fiescherblick.ch.

Come for the cuisine, stay for the views and elegant comfort of feather quilts and pillows, terraces, panoramic sauna and hot tub. Brothers—Matthias and Lars—are guides extraordinaire and know all the nooks and crannies. Think simplicity of Scandinavian design mixed with warm Grindelwald heritage and welcome and you'll never want to leave.

Hotel Gletschergarten. www.hotel-gletschergarten.ch.

Classic Swiss hotel with family charm and excellent dining options. Gaby and Gery will delight you with family history and Grindelwald highlights.



Brown Swiss in the verdant green and wildflower covered fields and there's the rush of multiple avalanches roaring down ravines. A person could sit all day here, staring in all directions with wonder, and be content. But this is also a wild realm of untrampled hiking trails, and with the local, expert guidance from Matthias, the first son of this longstanding family who own this boutique hotel and the classic Hotel Gletschergarten next door, Brian and I are guided through an Alpine Wonderland for three days of hiking. Throw in "destination" dining of four courses with