

DRIVE SWITZERLAND IT'S LIKE NOWHERE ELSE

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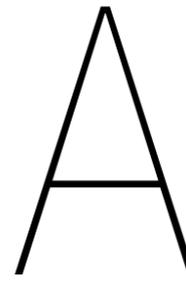
This Page, An interesting entrance to a farm near Bad Ragaz **Opposite**, endless vistas across a land of splendour



THERE'S NO BETTER EXCUSE FOR GETTING BEHIND THE WHEEL OF A LUXURY CAR THAN A ROAD TRIP; ESPECIALLY WHEN THE DESTINATION IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST BREATH-TAKING LOCATIONS.



Clockwise from top left, Bed-in-a-Barrel accommodations near Bad Ragaz; an art installation at Hotel Quellenhof in Bad Ragaz; the mixologist at Hotel Quellenhof, prepares a cocktail; a farmhouse kitchen near Bad Ragaz



As far as country's go Switzerland is petite. The words 'size doesn't matter' couldn't be truer as Switzerland is packed with Alpine delights, four languages and the world's topmost producers of time. The sights are of an epic scale but distances between them short. Thus, against a backdrop of immense forested mountains, lush meadows, azure lakes and cobalt-blue skies, I travelled across just a small part of the immaculate alpine passes and ravines and saw Switzerland as it's meant to be seen – from the road driving a Porsche 911 Carrera 4 GTS.

As time is short I need to focus on the sights I most want to experience and plan my **Grand Tour** road trip accordingly - creating a driving nirvana through Switzerland's south-east corner, travelling just 650km in four days.

Within an hour of leaving **Zurich** I find myself getting up close and personal with some of the most spectacular eye-candy on the planet. All my petrol-head expectations are surpassed and replaced by the stuff of motoring dreams - driving on twisting asphalt, cobbled streets and snow-covered mountain tracks.

My first Grand Tour night is spent in **Bad Ragaz** where I check into the multi-award winning *Hotel Quellenhof* (acclaimed as one of the world's leading spas, complete with a private hospital) who's 124-acres of landscaped gardens have been transformed by art.

Making a slow start to **Davos**, the highest town in Europe, I take a short diversion to savour the views from the elegant architectural masterpiece of the *Salginatobel Bridge*. En-route I drive through villages of timber-clad homes covered in larch tiles – all with their grain stores on stilts. A further detour delivered me to the *Walserhuus Sertig*, a traditional chalet restaurant with a panoramic mountain view and a local speciality of smoked bacon and pearl barley soup served by traditionally dressed waitresses adorned in time-honoured costumes.

Before heading to my designer *Grischa Hotel* in Davos, once an isolated mountain-farming village turned winter tourist resort, I stop at *BierVision* in *Monstein*, the highest altitude micro-brewery in Europe. Following a guided tour, I take to their basement bar, *Gambrinus*, where I sample their

potent whisky, egnog and cured meats.

Leaving Davos, I set the GPS for **St Moritz**, making a detour via a couple of mountain passes. Reaching an elevation of 2383m, the *Flüela Pass* goes almost unnoticed in the pantheon of Europe's great driving roads and ironically, I drove it en-route to the most lauded, the *Stelvio Pass*. From Davos the Flüela runs for the best part of 28kms, mixing tempting straights, gorgeous curves and 37 long, sweeping bends. The road climb almost immediately, at first gently and then more precipitously towards the peak. The 911 eats the first few kilometres with disdain, yet the engine note barely rises above a snarl. At this point, and in the absence of any real testing corners, it occurred to me that I had neglected to engage 'Sports Mode' - which changed everything.

I pointed the 911's nose to northern Italy and the Stelvio Pass, the ascent of which offers 75 vigorous full lock hairpin bends, demanding serious driving know-how. Shortly before reaching the summit the scenery changes from picture-postcard to a breath-taking snowline vista. Towards the top, it is near impossible to get the speed up as the bends are very close together. A few final, dramatic hairpins had me at the summit and into a small parking area where I stopped to fully appreciate the view and vertical drop-offs. I took myself off to my final stop - the champagne climate and seductive shops of **St Moritz**.

Peace and tranquillity were on my wish-list, thus I indulged in the vertical mineral spa in nearby *Samedan*. *The Samedan Mineral Baths & Spa*, tacked onto the back of a baroque church in the town square, is spread over five floors, each encapsulating an ambient light water theme. Progressing from the locker room with its cowhide ottoman's I took in the aroma chambers, Jacuzzi and herbal steam room. Pleasantly parboiled I proceeded to the massage area where masseuse delivered a no-frills, all business massage, helping me discover new muscle groups I didn't know I had. For what seems like an eternity but in reality, is only 15-minutes, my body is vigorously pressed and kneaded, by the end of which I felt certain I would be rolled up like a ball of pastry and folded into a croissant. The recovery room is on the rooftop - an open-air bath with views of winter sunshine across the



Clockwise from top left, You can't get more unique than sleeping in a wine barrel; check out their cheese stash at Alpine Cheese Dairy Morteratsch; you're surrounded by a vineyard in your beer barrel accommodations; ask for a cocktail in Switzerland and you're given a glass of art; **Opposite**, after lunch at Walsertal Sertig in Davos-Sertig, be sure to take a short hike to their spectacular waterfall



AT LEISURE SWITZERLAND



ST. MORITZ, EUROPE'S WINTER GLAM CAPITAL, WHERE FURS PREDOMINATE AND CAVIAR IS SOLD IN SUPERMARKETS AND SNOW-CHAINED BENTLEY'S JOCKEY WITH FERRARI'S FOR PARKING.

stunningly beautiful snow-capped mountains of the Engadin.

Later, I stopped for a cheese making demonstration at the Alpine Cheese Dairy Morteratsch, did a guided tour of St Moritz where I discovered the Engadin nutcake, Hatecke's triangular cured venison sausage which is displayed like jewellery in bottom-lit cabinets, and found a mini chocolate factory in the basement of the Confiserie Hauser. Fractionally fatter, I put my feet up at the *Grand Hotel Kronenhof's* fabulous bar, taking in an expertly blended Black Russian.

Heading back to Zurich, I passed several picture-book villages and more than once stopped to marvel at this diminutive country's unparalleled beauty. Switzerland is truly the land of superlatives – with the tastiest of roads. Another mountain pass came into view and I immediately engaged 'Sport Mode' - all fluffy thoughts of beautiful visas and pretty villages evaporating.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Bad Ragaz: According to Condé Nast Traveller's Spa Guide, *Hotel Quellenhof*, with its 267-rooms, is the best medi-spa in Europe and is internationally recognised for its Medical Health Centre in diagnostics, preventative care and rehabilitation – which I can personally attest to as I arrived with aches and pains which were swiftly dealt with by an onsite physiotherapist who vigorously pressed and kneaded me until I could be rolled up like a ball of pastry and reshaped into a bagel. The Quellenhof also have a casino and two golf courses – one of which is an 18-hole PGA course (the European Championship is held there every year); a Porsche and a Harley Davidson are made available to guests for a day loan (included in room rates); and they have six culinary diverse restaurants; for light, easily digestible and freshly prepared Thai and Chinese specialities be sure to dine in Namun. Room rates start at CHF490. www.resortragaz.ch

Bed-in-a-Barrel: There's a quirky accommodation option not far from Bad Ragaz - converted wine barrel stays on a vineyard. CHF150 buys a barrel for two, a fondue dinner, a bottle of regional wine, linen and a farmer's breakfast. schlaf-fass.ch

Davos: *The Grisca Hotel* is a chic 93-room modern designer hotel, dressed in sultry colours and draped in mood lighting.

Despite all the trendiness, it's practical and comfortable.

The sophisticated Pulsa Bar, with its leather furnishings and fur throws, makes for cosy and exclusive pre-dinner drinks. The five restaurants have turned this hotel into a sensational gourmet destination. Rates start at CHF115. hotelgrischa.ch
St. Mortiz/Pontresina: The elegant *Grand Hotel Kronenhof*, just 6km from St. Moritz, provides the best of both worlds, providing the glitz of St. Moritz whilst soaking up the peace of a mountain village. Discerning travellers will enjoy this historic hotel's reception areas which are all heavy draped in floor-to-ceiling silk curtains. The pièce de résistance is dining in the gourmet 'Grand Restaurant', a magnificent neo-baroque banqueting hall, complete with a rococo ceiling. My bedroom, one of 112, is located in the Kronenhof's new and contemporary Spa wing with a balcony overlooking the River Flaz and the imposing St. Moritz mountains. Rates start at CHF465. kronenhof.com

LUNCH STOPS

Walserhuus Sertig in Davos-Sertig has a great selection of regional dishes – be sure to sample their potato rosti. Just a short walk from the restaurant is a spectacular waterfall and hiking route beyond. www.walserhuus.ch
Hotel Meisser in Guarda is on a hillside location with breathtaking views. Be sure to ask for a window seat in their dining room where you'll be looking out across some of the most beautiful mountain scenery in the world. The salmon, smoked with wood from local vines, served on a dill sauce is delicious. hotel-meisser.ch

GETTING THERE

SWISS Air, part of Star Alliance, flies from Singapore to Zurich, Basel, Geneva, Lugano and Sion (just under 13 hours). Out of ski season return prices average around SGN1198. At breakfast, a Continental breakfast and coffee make their way around economy; business class is offered something more substantial; but everyone cheers up when indulgent little Swiss chocolates are handed out. swiss.com

Care hire: Europe Luxury Cars have a tasty selection of supercars to hire europeluxurycars.com. For more information about the Grand Tour seemyswitzerland.com

Clockwise from top left, The Grisca Hotel in Davos has five restaurants that have turned this hotel into a sensational gourmet destination; The elegant Grand Hotel Kronenhof has employ a pianist to tickle the ivory's of a grand piano in this luscious room. Seemingly he plays all day; A discerning jam session at Hotel Quellenhof

