

Traveller

Six of the best: Swiss historic hotels

Richard Tulloch - Aug 12 2016 at 12:15 AM

ROMANTIK SEEHOTEL SONNE, KUSSNACHT



It began as a small tavern in 1641, in the village of Kussnacht, a few minutes by train along the lake from Zurich. After expansions and the addition of a ballroom in the 19th century, Sonne became a place for serious discussion, with guests including Carl Jung, Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann and Vladimir Lenin. That the beer garden and restaurant by the water would be popular with locals is a given. A bonus is the hotel's serious original art collection, with works by Andy Warhol, Alexander Calder and leading Swiss artists. See sonne.ch

HOTEL TERRASSE AM SEE, VITZNAU



Opened in 1871 as the hotel for the Rigi Railway company, this small, simple and charming hotel has the massive advantage of a site right on the edge of Lake Lucerne. Now privately owned, it is an excellent base for the trip on Europe's first mountain railway, ratcheting steeply up to the lookouts, restaurants and walking trails on Mount Rigi. The restaurant serves fish caught in the lake, meat from the farm up the hill and wine so local you can see the vineyard from the hotel terrace. See hotel-terrasse.ch

HOTEL WILDEN MANN, LUCERNE



When a mammoth bone was mistaken for a giant human femur, the legend of Lucerne's "wild man" was born. He was supposed to protect the town from outsiders. For 500 years, the Wilden Mann in Lucerne's old town has been welcoming them. Creaky floorboards, winding staircases and original washstands in the corridors set the atmosphere, while the establishment has been modernised (and a lift and en suites added!) with each room decorated in an original way. See wilden-mann.ch

GRIMSEL HOSPIZ, GUTTANNEN



The name and the location suggest an institution run by an evil genius from a James Bond movie. The original inn dates back to 1142, serving travellers over the remote mountain pass. The present hotel was rebuilt in 1932, above the hydroelectric dam surrounded by snow-capped peaks, switchback roads and walking trails. In winter the road is impassable and the Grimsel is reachable only by cable cars and a shuttle through underground tunnels. It's impossible to imagine a more extraordinary approach to a hotel. Once there, visitors are trapped in "luxury Alcatraz" as the manager describes it. See grimselwelt.ch

HOTEL MONTE ROSA, ZERMATT



In 1865, in the dining room, English alpinist Edward Whymper planned the first successful ascent of the Matterhorn, towering above the village. "Successful" may not be the ideal term, because though Whymper's team reached the summit, four of his companions perished on the descent. Queen Victoria called for a ban on climbing the peak, which Zermatt residents claim only made tourism to the area more popular. Photographs in the hotel's elegant Belle Epoque lounges trace the line of climbers and other celebrities who have stayed here, while thousands of visitors to Zermatt point their smartphones at the peak. See monterosazermatt.ch

LANDGASTHOF RUEDIHUS, KANDERSTEG



This classic Swiss chalet, 250 years old, plays up its rural charm with geranium pots on the windowsills, low wooden ceilings, a collection of clocks in the breakfast room and staff in traditional dress. The towering cliffs behind it make the perfect setting for a simple meal of traditional Swiss cuisine (cheese, cheese, cheese, potato, ham and cheese) in the form of fondu, raclette or rosti. For those looking for more upmarket comforts, its partner hotel Doldenhorn, with spa, swimming pool and fine dining, is a five-minute walk away. See doldenhorn-ruedihus.ch

Richard Tulloch was the guest of Switzerland Tourism and Swiss Historic Hotels.

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