

2010 Switzerland

Friday June 25, 2010. Ever since I read Heidi¹ as a child, I have wanted to see Switzerland². But aside from two nights in Zurich, I had never been there. Thus, Scotti and I planned a twelve-day excursion with Tauck³ called "Leisurely Switzerland".

Two days ago Scotti called and said that the severe headaches she as having would make the trip impossible for her, but that Mary was available. We put Susan to work making the changes. The biggest problem was an air ticket for Mary for last minute Business Class would be over \$8000. Tom, who works for Delta Airlines, went to work and found that a Delta employee and family could get a confirmed ticket for 20% off any published fare. Then Mary went to work and found that she could get from JFK to Switzerland for much less. To get her to New York I used frequent flyer miles. Then she tried to book her end of it but it did not seem to want to take my credit card. We tried three different cards and finally one seemed to take. The next day I learned that the cost had been authorized three times! However it seems only one ticket was issued so in ten days the authorization will be over and my credit reestablished.

The other problem is that they now require your full name on a reservation and Mary's hyphenated name is too long for the computer to take! She managed to get to New York but then had some problems getting on the flight to Paris to connect to Geneva. Once aboard I got a frantic telephone call from her that every pillow on the flight was stuffed with feathers. Mary is very allergic to ducks and feathers⁴. I did not know what to do but suggested she start taking her histamine tablets right away.

My limo picked me up about 6 pm for the ride to the airport. My flight did not leave until 8:50. It was closer to nine before we took off and I worried about my connection in Paris. We finally boarded and I had a very congenial seatmate. He was born in Pakistan and raised in England. He now works for Coca Cola. We discussed some of the political problems in the Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan area. He also was interested in my opinion of the new "World of Coca Cola." I don't like it nearly as much as the older one. It is too much children's entertainment and not enough about Coca Cola.

They did not have menus on board and the Chinese stewardess was not very good at explaining the dinner choices, but I ordered the beef. As soon as I could I pulled up my blanket, put my head on the down pillow and fell asleep.

Saturday, June 26. I woke about 2 hours before we got to Paris. We had made up some time and were only 15 minutes late, but I still had a very short connection. The man who pushed the chair literally ran to get me from Terminal E to F2, during which I felt like I saw everything in the terminal from check-in to baggage claim! We went through two security checks. However we did get to the gate while they were still boarding. After checking in I was then taken to the wheelchair bus and we drove to the plane so we "Wheelies" could be hoisted up like the meals and not have to climb stairs.

Air France served a not-so-hot lunch during the 45-minute flight to Geneva. Then I was back in the wheelchair brigade but there were only two men for three chairs. The man who pushed me did not speak English so I was glad that I do parle un peu français. It all seemed to take forever but at last he had my bags loaded onto a cart. Whereupon I told him I could walk the rest, got out of the chair, and went through customs pushing my cart. Eric from Tauck was there waiting. One young couple, Robin and Andy Weiss, had already arrived from Miami. Then Barbara Petty from Jacksonville joined us. We waited for the fifth person. It eventually dawned on me who this might be and I asked who the other name was. Sure enough it was Scotti that we were waiting for!

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heidi>

² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Switzerland>

³ <http://www.tauck.com/>

⁴ http://www.immunocapinvitrosight.com/dia_templates/ImmunoCAP/Allergen____28511.aspx

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We were loaded into a van for the hour drive to Montreaux⁵. Alps lurked in the haze on the right overlooking Lake Geneva, which the French call Lac Lemman. It is the largest freshwater lake in Europe. We could see sailboats enjoying the summer weather and we saw vineyards in the countryside. We could not see Mont Blanc⁶ since there were clouds to obscure its 15,782 peak, the highest in Europe. We passed Vevey, the home of Nestlé.

The Royal Palace Hotel⁷ is lovely overlooking the lake. I was so relieved to see Mary, and while she was somewhat the worse for wear she seemed in pretty good spirits. She did check with the desk and found a nearby pharmacy that had some more allergy medicine, for her fear is that she will lose her voice. We both lay down and slept.

We went to the Sinatra Bar for snacks and our welcome drinks. I tried the local wine, which was delicious. It was delightful to dine al fresco and watch the sunset. The weather is perfect after all the heat we have come from. Then we had someone up to the room to fix the safe and show us how to connect with the wireless WIFI. There were also fireworks to watch so we enjoyed an early Fourth of July celebration.

Sunday, June 27. After a leisurely breakfast, we walked along the promenade next to the lake. It was charming, with flower displays and wind chimes. It was Sunday so the vendor booths were not open. We came to where the excursion boat was and after buying tickets went in search of sunscreen. We took an elevator up to the 4th floor where we found the Main Street (this tells you how steep the ground is). Here in a small grocery store we stocked up on bananas, sunscreen and a bottle of water. The Garnier Ambre Solaire sunscreen cost \$25 and was our first introduction into how expensive everything is in Switzerland.

Thus armed, we went to board the Vezey. This is just one of the historic boats the ferry service operates. It was built in 1907 and does two-hour sightseeing cruises around the lake. We made a grand circle of the north end of Lake Geneva, stopping a dozen or more times at various towns where people could board or land. We passed Chateau de Chillon, an imposing fortress that we visit tomorrow. It was a most beautiful day for such an excursion. After the boat ride I went back to the hotel to take a nap, but Mary continued down the promenade and bought some gifts to take back to her family.

At 6 pm, we went to the welcome reception and dinner. There are 33 of us, many from the south, and one couple from New Zealand. We had cocktails on the terrace and Steve Jolis, our tour manager, introduced every one of us. Then we went into the restaurant for dinner. There was an antipasti table and after that we waited for the main course. And we waited for a long time. Two ladies from Williamsburg, Becky Paluzsay and Roxie White, were at the table and they had just arrived in Europe. It was obvious that they wanted to get dinner over with so they could go to bed. After an hour of waiting I went in search of Steve and told him I thought the service was outrageous. At last the main course arrived. It was chicken and not terribly exciting. I left when it was over for I did not want to wait another hour for the promised chocolate desert. Mary arranged for room service to bring my desert to the room, so at least I did get to enjoy it.

Monday, June 28. Our bags were picked up in the room at 7 am and we went down to breakfast. The first blow was that Tauck only provided one 44-passenger bus for us. By the time the excess luggage was parked on the back seat this meant we were unable to spread out. In Egypt, in February, National Geographic provided 2 buses for the 38 of us and almost everyone was able to have a seat for himself. I am beginning to have grave doubts about this trip. We were introduced to the bus driver Rolly and came to admire his skill on the mountainous roads.

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montreux>

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mont_Blanc

⁷ <http://www.royalplaza.ch/en/index/Welcome-to-the-Royal-Plaza-Montreux.html>

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Then we were off to the Chateau de Chillon⁸, a wonderful fortress built on a rock in Lac Lemman. This was the summer residence of the Dukes of Savoy⁹ who wanted to get away from the heat of Italy and Austria. It also was used as a prison where the protestors (Protestants) were kept in a dungeon. We saw the column where a monk, Francois Bonivard, was supposedly chained from 1532 to 1536. Lord Byron¹⁰ wrote a famous epic poem, The Prisoner of Chillon¹¹ about it and in the graffiti on one pillar they pointed out his signature.

In the Ducal quarters we were shown the typical medieval tapestries that were hung to keep the castle warm and carried with them Dukes as they moved from residence to residence. The guide also pointed out that most people shared a plate with their neighbor and that the art of toasting started because people were afraid of being poisoned. They clanked their mugs so hard that the liquid commingled.

We then drove through alpine fields where cow and sheep grazed. Lush pastures and vineyards are all watered artificially since it is so dry here.

At last we came into Gruyère¹², a lovely town built around an old castle, and best known for its cheese. After some time shopping, we had a fondue lunch. Along with the fondue we had Rösti¹³, the national dish. Its base is always potato, boiled or fried, over which you scoop roasted cheese. It would have been nicer if they had allowed the windows to be open, but they were kept shut so that the flame under the fondue would not go out. Consequently the room was stifling.

Then it was back on the bus for four more hours to Visp where we caught the train to Zermatt. When I booked the trip, I told Susan I was only up to three hours a day on a bus and that is what Tauck promised, but what they meant was, that it would not be more than three hours between stops. By the time we stopped for the afternoon toilet break I was getting very stiff and sore and went to the back of the bus where I could lie down for a while among the hand luggage. It was all too short a time before everyone returned to the bus and I had to go to my seat. By the time we got to the train station at Visp, I wasn't even sure if I could walk to the train! In addition, the tourist disease hit. Mary also was stricken.

The best part of the day was the train, although it was only second-class due to some mix-up in the reservation. We were told we would have a private Tauck Car, but instead were spread through three different cars. We had spectacular views as we climbed up to Zermatt. Cars and buses cannot go there and our baggage was transferred by an electric pickup truck. The Swiss don't want to pollute their beautiful country.

Deep chasms, rushing streams and beautiful waterfalls were just part of the trip. There were also the alpine chalets perched high up on the Alps and the curious Walliser houses with their curious heavy slate roofs built in the 16th and 17th century. The Wallisers were the ancient tribe who occupied this valley. When we got to Zermatt¹⁴, we found the hotel had sent an electric car to bring our hand luggage and Mary arranged for me to go with the luggage which was a blessing as I could hardly walk another step,

The Mont Cervin Palace Hotel¹⁵ was my favorite of the trip. Mont Cervin is the French name for the 14,692-foot high peak, known as the Matterhorn¹⁶. From our balcony we had a great view of it

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ch%C3%A2teau_de_Chillon

⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Savoy

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Gordon_Byron,_6th_Baron_Byron

¹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Prisoner_of_Chillon

¹² http://www.isyours.com/e/guide/lake_geneva/gruyeres.html

¹³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rösti>

¹⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zermatt>

¹⁵ <http://www.seilerhotels.ch/en/mont-cervin-palace/>

¹⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matterhorn>

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pointing up to the sky. It is a magnificent peak and we are lucky to see it for it often has its head in the clouds. The town itself is tightly packed into a valley and the architecture ranges from stone houses to log cabins.

We gathered ourselves together to have an elegant dinner in the grillroom of the hotel. I wish I had been up to the five courses but I settled for consommé and filet of sole. Then for desert I had a chocolate delight with a small ball of ice cream. We were then presented with chocolate truffles. I had one shaped like the Matterhorn!

Back in the room Mary and I lay on the beds nursing our ailments and working on our computers with the free WIFI. At the last hotel it was free but on a cable so we had to take turns. During the night I got up and had a thrilling view of the Matterhorn bathed in moonlight,

Tuesday, June 29. Mary went off to take the cog train up to near the summit of the Matterhorn. I headed off to the spa and had a wonderful if expensive (\$125) massage to get rid of the stiffness. When Mary reappeared, we took a walk in the delightful town of Zermatt. We peeked into the church where a few people were reciting the catechism. Then we checked out the Matterhorn museum¹⁷, a well-done series of exhibits showing how life was in the old days here. Also we saw a film about the first successful climb to the summit and how the rope broke killing some of the team on the descent.

Behind the church we discovered the Mountain Guide Cemetery filled with the graves of people who had been killed on the mountain. We photographed many of the stones to put up at www.findagrave.com. We noted the plaque to Edward Whymper¹⁸, the British mountaineer who was the first man to scale the Matterhorn in 1865.

Then we sat in a small café and had ice cream. Up the street in front of us came the first herd of goats coming back from the pastures. We grabbed our cameras and chased after them. Three herds came by, black and white goats with long horns, each with a belled lead goat ahead and a shepherd or two behind.

Back at the hotel, we rested a bit before going out to dinner at Stadel Zermatt, a small restaurant near the hotel. It specialized in different kinds of "Rösti". My dish was potatoes and mushrooms. It was nice to have a small manageable meal.

Wednesday, June 30. Bags were out at 6:45 am for we have a long day ahead in the bus. We caught the train back to Tasch. This is as close to Zermatt as you can reach by road unless you have an electric vehicle. Here Rolly waited with the bus. The trip from Zermatt to Tasch only took 15 minutes and it was a different track than the one we came up.

I decided to try one of the back seats, which was better than sitting two abreast with Mary for it gave some "flapping" room. Ron Johnson was also sitting there, one of the New Zealand couple. He is well into his seventies, but still very athletic and competes in senior decathlons all around the world. He had decided to hike down from the Matterhorn and had quite an adventure when he became lost. He also was bruised from when he had fallen.

We made one rest stop before coming into Stresa¹⁹ on Lake Maggiore, which is in Italy. Steve led us into a small restaurant in the town for a so-so pasta lunch. We sat with Ron and his wife Joan. Also at the table was Chuck McGuire from Arlington, VA. He is traveling alone although he seems to be the oldest one in the group.

¹⁷ http://www.zermatt.ch/en/page.cfm/experience/culture/matterhorn_museum

¹⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Whymper

¹⁹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stresa>

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Then we caught the launch to Isola Bella²⁰ in Lake Maggiore. The Borromeo family palace is on the island. The head of the family is one of the Counts of Milan. In 1632, Carlo III started construction on a palazzo dedicated to his wife, Isabella D'Adda, from whom the island takes its name. We had a funny tour guide who flirted with all the ladies as he pointed out the magnificent art objects and showed us the architectural details of each room. We were not shown the family quarters on the second floor, but the staterooms and grottoes below were amazing. Then there was time for a walk in the gardens but it was hot and I sat in the shade while Mary made friends with a white peacock strutting about.

For the last three hours in the bus I sat with Mary for we have progressed to near the front. I may not have mentioned that Tauck assigns the seats twice each day to give everyone a chance at the front. We started near the back and have advanced two rows at a time.

We got to the Grand Hotel Eden²¹ in Lugano²², Switzerland, about 5:30. Our room overlooks the lake and the view is beautiful although it is so hot we have to acclimate from the brisk mountain air we have been enjoying. The Piedmont is only 600 feet or so above sea level. We had dinner with Joan and Ron and a couple from Salt Lake, Allen and Nancy Sparrow. He is principal of a private school in Salt Lake. Nancy should be a member of the Chamber of Commerce since she seemed so knowledgeable about her hometown. I had an allergy attack in the middle of dinner and left to sneeze in peace in our room.

Thursday, July 1, 2010. I was so tired I slept like a log and didn't wake up until almost 9. Then we had a frantic time because Mary woke up congested and we had to find the feather culprit. It turned out to be that the spare pillow in the closet had feathers. They had changed the other pillows, but forgotten this.

After breakfast, we ventured out into the heat and humidity, such a contrast to the mountains. We found a pharmacy and bought Mary hemorrhoid and allergy medicine and another \$25 bottle of Eau Thermale Avène²³ sun lotion. We have misplaced the first bottle.

We decided to ride the little tourist train that runs from one end of town to the other. It seemed to end at a funicular and we decided to go investigate the 1000-meter high peak, Monte Bré²⁴, overlooking Lugano. There was no one there to sell tickets. We sat in the cab for five or ten minutes and nothing happened. Mary poked the various buttons but no one came on to speak. Finally another couple, Italian, came and climbed in as if they knew what was going on. After another five minutes there were whistles and the doors closed. Up we went. The funicular was in two parts and half way up there was a spot to buy tickets. We crossed a street to the next tram. The views became more spectacular and I envied the people with the million dollar views along the track. One stop just before we reached the top seemed to be a private station for people who lived there. After they got off, the driver couldn't get it started again. He closed and opened the doors a number of times and even got on his phone for help but nothing seemed to work until he left the cab at the front of the train and went to the one at the rear. I thought we might have to get out and walk, but at last he got it working and we went to the top. There was a café and Mary and I enjoyed cokes in the lovely cool shade. A lovely view of the mountains lay in front of us. As we got up to leave we noticed the driver also got up from a nearby table. It was if he had been waiting for us. There were a lot of people waiting at the station. We shared our cab with an Australian couple. He is working in Germany.

Reaching the bottom we got aboard our little train again for the trip back to the hotel. The driver stopped for his lunch and so Mary and I enjoyed a pizza in a nearby café. All of a sudden, I

²⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isola_Bella_%28Lago_Maggiore%29

²¹ <http://www.edenlugano.ch/EN/hotel/Soggiornare.cfm?CFID=15699932&CFTOKEN=1680698>

²² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lugano>

²³ <http://www.aveneusa.com/>

²⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monte_Br%C3%A8

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noticed one of the lenses from my eyeglasses was missing. I have no replacement so this was a near catastrophe, but the waiter found the missing lens in the chair where I was sitting and put it back together. He even cleaned them before he gave them back to me. I have new glasses ordered and will retire this pair when I get home. Then we walked down a cool shaded street behind the café that was lined with upscale shops. At the end was a church. It was interesting inside since half way down the nave there was hung a huge painting of the crucifixion. We spent some time studying it and noting the townspeople and other figures.

After the church, we looked for a station for our tram and not finding one started walking in the direction of the hotel. There was a park along the shore with interesting sculptures. We walked and walked and no train ever came. It must use a different route going back. The upshot was that I walked all the way back to the hotel! I was really tired so we rested for a time while we discussed what to do about dinner. Mary said they sold sandwiches in the bar and we thought that would do until we saw that a club sandwich would cost \$28! We walked across the street to the pizza parlor and I had a brat and French fries while Mary had spaghetti. With a split of wine it came to \$45. Apparently they have few taxes in Switzerland and so stick it to the tourists in hotels and restaurants.

Friday, July 2. We left at eight for the drive to San Moritz. Our route took us back to Italy and we drove along the shore of beautiful Lake Como. It is a lake of glacial origin. We stopped to take a water taxi across the lake to a Bellagio²⁵ to give us some "retail therapy". There are many shoppers in the group. Lake Como is shaped like a Y and Bellagio is at the tip of the peninsula separating the two southern arms. Not being a shopper, I suggested to Mary that we ride the small tourist sightseeing tram. In twenty minutes we made a loop up through the residential areas. Highest was a building marked "Museo" although we could not make out that the guide was saying about it. On the wall was an elaborate sundial, which apparently was designed to shift according to the seasons. This was part of the Rockefeller Foundation Center that offers conferences for scholars, artists and scientists to get together and pursue ideas. There were some estate homes hidden behind walls.

At the end we found we still had time to shop and I walked with Mary part way into town admiring the tiny streets that were almost like alleys lined with shops. The prices were much more reasonable since we are in Italy. Mary found a lovely bag to bring back to Brenda. Then we caught the launch back to where the bus was waiting. It was only a short distance into Menaggio where we had lunch at the Grand Hotel.

Back on the bus we drove three hours up into the mountains to San Moritz. The scenery was spectacular with high cascades of waterfalls, rushing streams, and majestic views of mountains. Switzerland is so beautiful. One interesting feature to the houses in this part of Switzerland is the sgraffito decorations. Patterns are etched into the plaster and then painted so that the doors and windows appear to have fancy lintels and sometimes the corners are sgraffitooed to make it appear large blocks were used to build it.

We have been told San Moritz is known for skiing, but in summer there is little to do there. We stayed at the Kempinski Hotel des Bains²⁶ in Bad San Moritz²⁷. Bad refers to the mineral baths here. Unfortunately there was no time as we had decided to join some of the other single ladies on the tour for dinner: Barbara Petty, Melva Jackson and Gladys Forshee and Pam Bird (the last two another mother-daughter combo). The slow service took over two hours. My first course was an unusual melon and shrimp cold soup. Then I had a beef dish, with desert a strawberry and kiwi fruit mixture. We had been offered free soft drinks or wine at our own cost. I checked out the prices and settled for an 11SF glass of white Swiss wine, the most expensive glass of wine I have ever bought. Pam and Gladys did not check the prices and ordered 3 glasses of the Merlot. They

²⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bellagio>

²⁶ <http://www.kempinski.com/en/stmoritz/Pages/Welcome.aspx>

²⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Moritz

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were somewhat shocked at the 54SF bill at the end! The Swiss Franc and the Dollar are about equal in value. Our room was up under the eaves and not too well air-conditioned. I found it difficult to sleep even with the windows open.

Saturday, July 3. We drove to the train station to catch the legendary Glacier Express²⁸. It is not really an express train, for it takes seven and a half hours to travel from San Moritz to Zermatt. To build this rail track over the Alps was a real engineering feat for there were 91 tunnels and 291 high bridges spanning rushing streams to navigate the mountainous terrain. I had looked forward to this highlight of the tour. In a lot of places a rack-and-pinion system helps control the train as it navigates the steep grades.

It was a real disappointment to find our reservation was mixed up again. Instead of the Vista Domed air-conditioned cars we were seated in the non-air-conditioned Second Class cars with no overhead windows to see the tops of the mountains and the only air-conditioning was to lower the windows. I find it hard to believe that after we had had mixed up reservations going up to Zermatt that Steve hadn't double-checked this reservation. He is an attentive guide in many ways but he really scored poor points on the trains. With the windows down, the train was very noisy and when we entered the first tunnel the air suction blew every loose item to the floor!

However the scenery was spectacular as our views were constantly changing from high mountains with glaciers cling to their peaks to flower strewn meadows that made us think of Heidi. Isolated homes and small villages, forests with the pines hardly having a foothold as the climbed the steep slopes. Then we would plunge into another long tunnel or cross a trestle high above the ravine far below. Steve tried to make our trip enjoyable, bringing us wine and snacks. When we got ready to open our box lunches he bought out pretty flowered placemats and napkins. Nevertheless I was glad when our five-hour ride was over.

Rolly was waiting with the bus at Andermatt. Then we had even more spectacular scenery as we climbed up to the Sustenpass²⁹. Stopping at the summit we stepped out to into the brisk air but the scene ahead of us was nothing but fog. A couple of people had an impromptu snowball fight with the remains of snow. Then we drove on to the Grand Regina Alpin Well & Fit Hotel³⁰ in the center of Grindelwald³¹. The weather had cleared and we had a great view of mountains out of our window.

Sunday, July 4. Steve appeared wrapped in an American Flag at breakfast. The weather didn't look too promising for our trip to see the Jungfrau³², 13,642 feet, one of the highest peaks in the Bernese Alps. Along with the Eiger and Mönch, the area was declared a World Heritage site in 2001.

We assembled at the train station and were escorted again to 2nd class cars for the ascent up to the "Top of Europe." The railway goes straight up with cogs between the tracks to help brake the train. The train uses energy to ascend that is replenished on the downward trip. After about 30 minutes we stopped and changed trains for the final trip to the summit. This was done through a long tunnel and took about an hour with two stops where we could take a five-minute break at bathrooms or a quick peek at the view. It took 16 years to build the tunnel. And then we were above the clouds! We arrived at Jungfrauoch station, a complex of restaurants and scenic outlooks and other attractions. It is the highest railway station in Europe. The air was a bit rarified at over 11,000 feet, but Steve had told us not to rush and get acclimated slowly so I had no trouble.

²⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glacier_Express

²⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Susten_Pass

³⁰ <http://www.grandregina.ch/>

³¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grindelwald>

³² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jungfrau>

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The view of the Jungfrau was magnificent. We had a restroom stop. Then we went and explored the ice palace that has been carved out of the glacier. There were ice sculptures to look at as we cautiously went through the rooms (the floor is ice). It was not overly cold, except for the handrails and I wished I had gloves. Then we went out into the slushy snow to get a closer look at the mountain. Everyone seemed surprised that I went out. I must appear much more infirm than I am.

We then hiked underground to another elevator that took us up into the Sphinx. This observatory was inaugurated in 1996, and is used for celestial observations. The views are spectacular and you can go out on a catwalk where you can almost touch the Jungfrau. It was then time to get back on the train for the descent.

We set out with Steve and some others for a hotel he recommended for lunch, but it was uphill and Mary and I soon gave up and had lunch in an open-air café in Grindelwald near the hotel. I had an expensive "sports" massage in the afternoon. It was somewhat like a deep tissue massage and helped with the aches and pains.

At 6:30 we gathered in the bar to see and hear an Alpenhorn³³ presentation. The man was very good at explaining how his instrument works. He can vary the notes by moving his lips and change the pitch by loosening one of the sections. The horn cost 4000SF and you go on a waitlist of two years for it. It is made of wood and then wrapped in bamboo. It is very important to keep it moist. I was invited to try it and managed to make it make an awful squawk. One of the tourists was fairly good at it and confessed to having played a trumpet at one time. The bar was offering a Fourth of July Special. A hamburger and French fries for a mere 30SF complete with a glass of wine and we decided to take it. The hamburger was a little strange with a cucumber garnish, but it was pleasant to eat with music in the background.

Monday, July 5. We set off to Interlaken³⁴, which is an attractive town with many old hotels. A chocolate shop distracted us and I bought some amazing truffles (the price was amazing as well!). Then I watched some hang gliders landing in a nearby park, but I was not tempted to try it.

We drove on to Berne³⁵, the Capital of Switzerland. Duke Berchtold V founded the city on the River Aare in 1191, naming it after a bear he had killed. It joined the Swiss federation in 1353. It became the capital of Bern Canton in 1831 and in 1848 it became the Swiss capitol. Our first stop was to see the bears. The old bear pit stands abandoned but must have been dreadful for the animals. The new one is larger and has grass and trees. A mother and two cubs were grazing for food.

Beyond them on the River Aare people were rafting and beyond that was the skyline of Berne, a World Heritage site. To qualify for this status the site must retain its original look and Berne has not changed much since a great fire in 1798 burned the town down. Today you see remnants of the original wall. We waited at the 13th century clock tower for noon and watched the rooster crow and Father Time turn the hourglass over. My pictures were very blurred and I asked Mary to see if she could fix my camera. She finally discovered the problem came from the sunscreen that had somehow gotten on the lens. Once clean it worked fine again.

There are many fountains in Berne but we did not see the one Steve described as depicting an ogre eating children. Steve took us to the Protestant church and printed out the statue of Moses nearby holding the Ten Commandments. He appears to have horns but we believe the artist meant this to show he was receiving enlightenment. Over the door of the church was an elaborate depiction of the Day of Judgment. We went inside and admired the lovely stained glass.

³³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alphorn>

³⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interlaken>

³⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bern>

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We were on our own for lunch and wandered back to near the market place where there were several outdoor cafes. We selected one with a roof for shade and I had a tomato salad. Mary also had tomatoes with chicken. Half the tour ended up in the same café.

For a time I watched an outdoor chess match, with chessmen two feet high on a chessboard on the pavement. Two men were having a spirited match but they did not seem to be very good at the game. Then it was back on the bus for the ride into Lucerne. As we drove into town Steve pointed out the two old covered bridges.

We had our group picture taken in front of the Lion of Lucerne, the famous sculpture by Bertel Thorvaldsen. It commemorates the massacre of the Swiss Guards in 1792 when revolutionaries stormed the Tuileries Palace in Paris.

Then we went to the Schweizerhof hotel³⁶. It once was two hotels, but now is rolled into one, and recently refurbished. Our room is in the east wing. It requires two elevators and two walks to get there. Once there, however, we found a pleasant room overlooking the river. It was also full of feathers. We dumped the bedding in the hall and called for someone to come fix the problem. In the process my glasses fell and both lenses popped out I went to the concierge to see if he could fix them. Instead I was referred to an optician. Following my instructions I set out but could not find Optic Koch anywhere. At last I stumbled on Optitech and a man fixed my glasses for nothing. The only bargain I have found in Switzerland!

For dinner we joined Roxie, Becky, Barbara and Melva for dinner. It took more than two hours but some had memorable lobsters and the ice-cream Sundays were incredible.

Tuesday, July 6. Our last day. I woke up very stiff and sore. There have been too many hours on buses on this tour. I decided to skip the walking tour and had a leisurely breakfast. Mary did take the tour and said it was very interesting. When Mary returned we went out and found a cafeteria. It was not the kind of cafeteria I think of since we sat and ordered from the menu that the waitress brought. I had a delicious curry chicken salad.

We then walked to the Hofkirche³⁷ (Abbey Court Church) with its tall spindly towers. It dates from 735 but the present building was built in 1633 in late Renaissance style. I walked all around the graveyard that was in a sort of arcade. There were no old stones, but some of the stones were interesting as they listed four generations of a family. The family crypt was either in the wall or under the paving and every grave under the paving was honored with flowers. Mary told me that she was told many of Lucerne's prominent citizens are buried here. We then returned to the hotel and were just in time for the tourist bus departure. It drove us through the city so I got to see many of the things Mary saw on the walking tour.

My plan then was to pack and rest, but rest would not come. My belongings are scattered about the room. My bag is on its last legs with a precarious stuck zipper and all I can do is stuff things in! I just hope I can get it home.

At 5:15 we went to the lobby and were walked across the street to a private boat and a tour of the lake. The pilot pointed out many of the beautiful homes. This lake is called the second cleanest lake in Switzerland. It has a speed limit of 20 knots so when a speedboat went by us we had some amusement watching the police boat try and catch it. (I don't think it did!) Our destination was a restaurant at the head of the lake where we had an excellent buffet and all the wine we could drink.

Back in Lucerne we said goodbye. I finished my packing and fell asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow.

³⁶ http://www.schweizerhof-luzern.ch/en/01_hotel/disclaimer.asp

³⁷ <http://www.flickr.com/photos/egold/2695135153/>

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Wednesday, July 7. My bags had to be out at 5:30 and we left at 6 for the hour and a half ride to the Zurich airport. There were ten of us in a twelve-passenger van towing our luggage in a trailer behind.

Checking in with Delta was the usual hassle and I was told to be at Aisle 7 at 8:30 for my wheelchair. With forty-five minutes to kill I walked with Barbara to an area with seats. She told me to wait for her there and disappeared. I waited for over a half hour but she didn't return. Knowing I had to check-in with the wheelchair people I left and soon found myself in an area with three Buddhist monks in their saffron robes. They were from Vietnam and the older one was much revered. All his helpers were most solicitous. They made the little bow with hand together with fingers up that you see in the orient. We were loaded into a cart for the trip to the gate. We went through two security checks and finally reached the gate. They were already boarding.

The meal was a new low in airline food with an inedible appetizer followed by a lukewarm pumpkin soup. Then I had the chicken appetizer since the steak appetizer on the last flight had not been good. The chicken was perhaps a little better but no much. The only part of the meal I enjoyed was the ice-cream desert. I watched Clint Eastwood's 'Invictus'³⁸ on the movie screen. Morgan Freeman was wonderful portraying Nelson Mandela, but what made the film even more interesting was that it was shown with Vietnamese sub-titles for my monk friends aboard.

³⁸ <http://invictusmovie.warnerbros.com/dvd/index.html>