

SURREAL
SPA
IN
THE
SKY

IF YOU HAVE EVER WANTED TO FEEL LIKE
YOU ARE IN A JAMES BOND FILM,
THEN ALL YOU NEED TO DO
IS CLIMB ABOARD A SMALL, UNASSUMING BOAT
AT LUCERNE'S BOAT PIER,
DESTINATION:
THE BÜRGENSTOCK RESORT

WORDS | FRANCESCA LYNAGH



STANDING ON THE FRONT DECK,

feeling the warmth of the spring sun on your face,
you can gaze out at the view that beats any image you will ever
see of Switzerland on a postcard. The green hue of the rolling hills is so
vivid that it seems almost artificial, and the crystal-clear water looks clean enough to
drink. A series of snow-capped mountains stand proudly in the distance.

Perched majestically on top of the steep hill straight ahead is The Bürgenstock Resort with its
glass cube jutting out of the front of the main building: it is one of the resort's restaurants, and you can
only imagine how stunning the view is from up there.

The boat pulls up to a pontoon, and just a few steps from the water awaits a bright red funicular carriage ready
to transport us 500 metres up the cliff face. The carriage looks like it has stepped straight out of a Wes Anderson
film. So does the gentleman checking our tickets, dressed in a smart blazer embroidered with flowers on the lapels.
A matter of minutes later we arrive at the hotel. Guests are invited to embark to the left, hikers and day visitors to the right.
As far as hotel arrivals go, it is probably as "movie star" as it gets.

We meander to the reception past the Lakeview Lounge, where people sit in plush armchairs admiring the view through
an enormous floor-to-ceiling window. There is a bird of prey, a red kite, floating playfully just below the window. Further into
the resort there is a mezzanine outside and, while it may still be early in the year, everyone is wearing T-shirts and sunglasses as
they sip on ice-cold rosé. As the unseasonably warm afternoon slowly turns to evening, waiting staff emerge clutching snugly fur
coats for guests to wrap themselves up in.

To find my room, I take a stroll through the historical corridor – a record of the resort's noteworthy backstory – and it makes
one realise that this place is not just a fancy hotel in a beautiful location; it is an institution steeped in fascinating history and
glamour.

It was first established in 1873 by two already accomplished businessmen, who had to build their own road to the resort
before they could even begin work on the hotel itself. When it finally opened, it represented the epitome of fashionable
hospitality, and has been a destination for discerning and celebrity travellers ever since.

Gazing at black-and-white photographs of actress Audrey Hepburn teeing off on the resort's golf course, it is clear why
she loved it here so much – she even married Mel Ferrer in the on-site chapel in 1954. I make a mental note to go
and visit the chapel the next day. Sophia Loren also had a special place in her heart for Bürgenstock. Arriving for
the first time in 1957, she and her husband, Carlo Ponti, made it their home for 13 years.

The next stage of the resort's evolution came in 2007, when Qatar's sovereign wealth fund became the
sole proprietor. Ten years of extensive refurbishment later, the new Bürgenstock Resort opened its
doors to reveal what can only be described as a labyrinth of luxury.

There are four separate hotels atop the ledge, each catering to different budgets and
desired holiday experiences. Not to mention the shopping arcade (complete
with an Omega store), the tennis court, and the impressive selection
of fantastic restaurants. But of all the resort's facilities, it is
the Alpine Spa that draws the most attention.

I don my fluffy



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dressing gown and head down to see what all the fuss is about. Descending the steps into the water-warm pool, two automatic doors slide open – an invitation to enter the outdoor section. A swim to the infinity pool's edge is greeted by a truly jaw-dropping panoramic vista. Framed by white-dusted mountains and rolling green hills, Lake Lucerne glistens in the sunlight. There can't be many other spas in the world with such an extraordinary backdrop. The pool wraps itself around a second edge of the building, the far side featuring a bench and Jacuzzi jets.

The hotel has introduced allocated photo-taking hours for exactly that reason. Dubbed "Splashing and Flashing" sessions, they are designed to limit the selfie-taking to just a few hours at the beginning and end of the day, protecting spa guests who simply want to unwind and have their privacy respected. When the session begins, it is no surprise that a slightly frantic jostle for the coveted corner spot ensues.

It is worth taking an evening meal at the RitzCoffier restaurant, which is adorned with 16 Gault-Millau points and now a Michelin star. It has a wine list so extensive that it is heavy to hold. I can't help but gawp at the masterpieces arriving

at the tables around me. Something appears served in a whole onion with liquid nitrogen steaming out of it – apparently, it is the duck appetiser. A perfectly cooked ribeye steak and one poached-pear pudding later, it becomes clear why this place has been described a "culinary Mecca of central Switzerland".

To work up an appetite again, the following morning involves a challenging 45-minute hike up the mountainside of the hotel. The end point is the Hammetschwand, Europe's highest outdoor lift, which was first opened in 1905. During winter it is closed, but it usually carries passengers 153 metres to the summit in under a minute. As I ascend the rocky mountain pathways, I stop to take a breath every so often, and I am stunned by the peace. All I can hear is the sound of a distant cowbell jangling somewhere in the valley below.

Soon thereafter, it is time to head back home to London. By then, dark, gloomy clouds have moved in below the resort and the view across the lake is completely transformed. Coat pockets bulging with Bürgenstock-branded chocolate (supplies for the flight home), I reluctantly take a seat on board the funicular for the return journey, all the way back down to earth.

W H E N T O G O

Lucerne is so beautiful that any season suits it, and a trip to The Bürgenstock Resort could easily be combined with a ski trip in winter.

W H E R E T O S T A Y

Rooms per person per night start at:

Bürgenstock Hotel: CHF 898

Palace Hotel and Conference: CHF 388

Waldhotel Health & Medical Excellence: CHF 388

Taverna: CHF 310

F O O D

From the Michelin-starred RitzCoffier restaurant to the more laid-back and traditional fondue-serving Taverna restaurant, there is absolutely no shortage of options.

C O S T S

Switzerland is notoriously expensive. Expect to pay upwards of CHF 10 (R146) for a small glass of wine.

G E T T I N G A R O U N D

Get the train from Zurich airport directly to Lucerne. The boat pier is right in front of the train station. Once you have arrived at the top of the funicular and seen the view, you will likely want to stay put.



G E T T I N G T H E R E

•• **FLY** SAA flies daily to Frankfurt and Munich from Johannesburg. From there, catch a connecting flight to Zurich with codeshare partner and fellow Star Alliance member SWISS. Visit flysaa.com

TRAIN From Zurich, take a scenic 50-minute train trip to Lucerne.

DRIVE The Bürgenstock Resort is a 20-minute taxi ride from Lucerne.