

Swiss Alps, Zurich & Paris ...

JSC Website Report

Trip Dates: March 22 – April 5, 2015

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A hundred thousand years ago it began to snow...

At first it was just a light dusting on the high fields and meadows that would one day be known as Switzerland's Bernese Oberland; but the snow fall became heavier and the winter was deeper and darker than previous winters. Then, in the spring, an unusual thing happened... the snow did not stop. It continued all summer, with freezing weather into the next winter. For eighty thousand years the snow piled up, never melting, creating glaciers that were miles thick all over northern Europe. The glaciers were massive crushing rivers of ice that were at war with the newly formed Swiss Alps. The relentless glaciers crushed granite into gravel and carved deep valleys on their march to the sea.

Finally, the ice began to melt, and as it did, it receded to reveal some of the most magnificent geologic formations on earth. Deep verdant valleys with cascading waterfalls, meandering streams, glistening glacial lakes and majestic rivers; all framed by the soaring snowcapped peaks of the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau Mountains.

This beautiful mountainous region became a Mecca for skiers and winter sports enthusiasts. First developed by the British in the early 1900's and later becoming famous the world over, attracting skiers and travelers from as far away as Florida. And on March 22nd, 24 members of the Jacksonville Ski Club joined the ranks of the travelers to this amazing region. We arrived at the Zurich Airport early on a crisp clear morning, boarded our private motorcoach and headed for Interlaken. We had planned the trip with the able support of Holiday Ski Tours and the camaraderie of the Pensacola Ski Club as our partners; they had their own motorcoach and we caravanned and stopped in Lucerne for lunch and sightseeing in this lovely lakeside town. After lunch we walked around the crystal clear lake and headed for the famous Lion of Lucerne, a huge sculpture carved into solid rock on the side of a towering cliff. It's a poignant monument to the Swiss Guard, who were massacred during the French Revolution. Mark Twain called it "*The most mournful and moving piece of stone in the world.*" I would say that it is also one of the most beautiful sculptures in existence.

We continued into the Alps and checked in to the Hotel Chalet Oberland, in the center of the beautiful town of Interlaken, situated between Lake Thun and Lake Brienz, and gateway to the Bernese Oberland. The hotel had recently been renovated and we enjoyed sumptuous breakfasts, and dinners in three different restaurants included in the price of the trip. We also enjoyed skiing, touring, and partying with the Jacksonville and Pensacola Ski Club members in the vast area of the Jungfrau. Kudos to Al Mazur for skiing every day and to Peggy, who would have been with him every day except for an unexpected tumble on the second day of skiing. Also, kudos to Arthur Grimbald, Jim Manning and Ann Burt for paragliding off the high cliffs above Interlaken and landing in the green park right next to our hotel. What a sight they must have had floating down from the Alps.

Several of us took the mountain train up to Mürren and even on to the Schilthorn, site of the James Bond movie "On her Majesty's Secret Service". We saw cascading waterfalls falling thousands of feet from the cliffs and had lunch at a restaurant perched on the edge of the cliff overlooking the villages below.

Besides the wonderful skiing on seemingly endless terrain, there were exciting day trips by train and local busses. Many of us took a train trip to the fascinating city of Thun, laced with canals from the lake, and we climbed the steep slopes up to the medieval Castle of Thun for an unforgettable view over the city, the lake, and the Alps. We also took a city bus to Iseltwald, a picturesque peninsula jutting out into the clear sparkling waters of Lake Brienz.

In the evenings, we enjoyed Après Ski parties at the top of the Hotel Metropole and in our private party area. We had a "Hat Party", a Hawaiian Luau, and on the last night in Interlaken we had a "Bling" evening at the hotel restaurant. What Fun !!!

From Interlaken we returned to Zurich, the largest and most sophisticated city in Switzerland and one of the highest rated cities in the world. We enjoyed three nights at the luxurious Swissotel Oerlikon, with a spa and infinity pool overlooking the city lights on the 32nd floor. We had a guided city tour and a three day Zurich Card to enjoy all of the fascinating museums, waterways, trolleys, cable cars and even the boats on Lake Zurich. We had a group dinner at the famous Zeughauskeller on the Paradeplatz and another at the Swiss Cuchi, where we enjoyed Swiss specialties like Raclette, Fondue and Pierrade... cooking on the hot stone.

After our time in Zurich, we boarded the TGV Lyria for a four hour high speed train trip to Paris. At one point we reached speeds of 200 mph, and we didn't spill a drop of wine. It was a four hour party and everyone was in good spirits as we arrived in Paris. We met our guide and on the way to our hotel we had a bus tour of the highlights of Paris... the Arc de Triomphe, the

Louvre, the Place de Concorde, Notre Dame, and of course, the Eiffel Tower. Our hotel was only a block from the Eiffel Tower and that evening we all walked to the tower and boarded the Bateaux Parisian for a twilight cruise down the Seine as the sun set and the lights twinkled on. We returned to our mooring just as the Eiffel Tower began to sparkle with thousands of lights blinking on and off. It was a magical evening in the "City of Light".

We had four nights in Paris and that was not nearly enough time to see all the attractions of this great city. We went to Montmartre, the Sacré Coeur, the Arc de Triomphe, the Louvre, Versailles, and of course the Eiffel Tower. Some of the group even took a long day trip to Normandy to see the American Cemetery and the site of the D-Day invasion.

After five days of "April in Paris" we bid farewell to this magnificent city and returned home to Florida. This was an incredible trip to some of the greatest destinations in the world and we returned with new friendships and rich memories that we'll cherish forever.