



Switzerland Vacation

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Switzerland Vacation Introduction

After I first visited Switzerland and had a great time I often told friends it was a place I'd love to revisit.

An opportunity for that arose when I booked on for the European Castles Tours "Three Corners of Europe – Black Forest, Alsace and Switzerland".

That tour was designed for air travel to and from Zurich, so there was an easy way to add an extension of my own. The last full day of the tour was at Lucerne, and I was able to plan my extension starting there.

I didn't want to repeat everything I'd done before, but I did know there was a magic region where I'd love to spend some more time.

The Bernese Oberland in central Switzerland extends south into the Bernese Alps. Its mixture of mountains, lakes, and valleys has made it very popular, not only for sightseeing but also for hiking and active sports, both winter and summer.

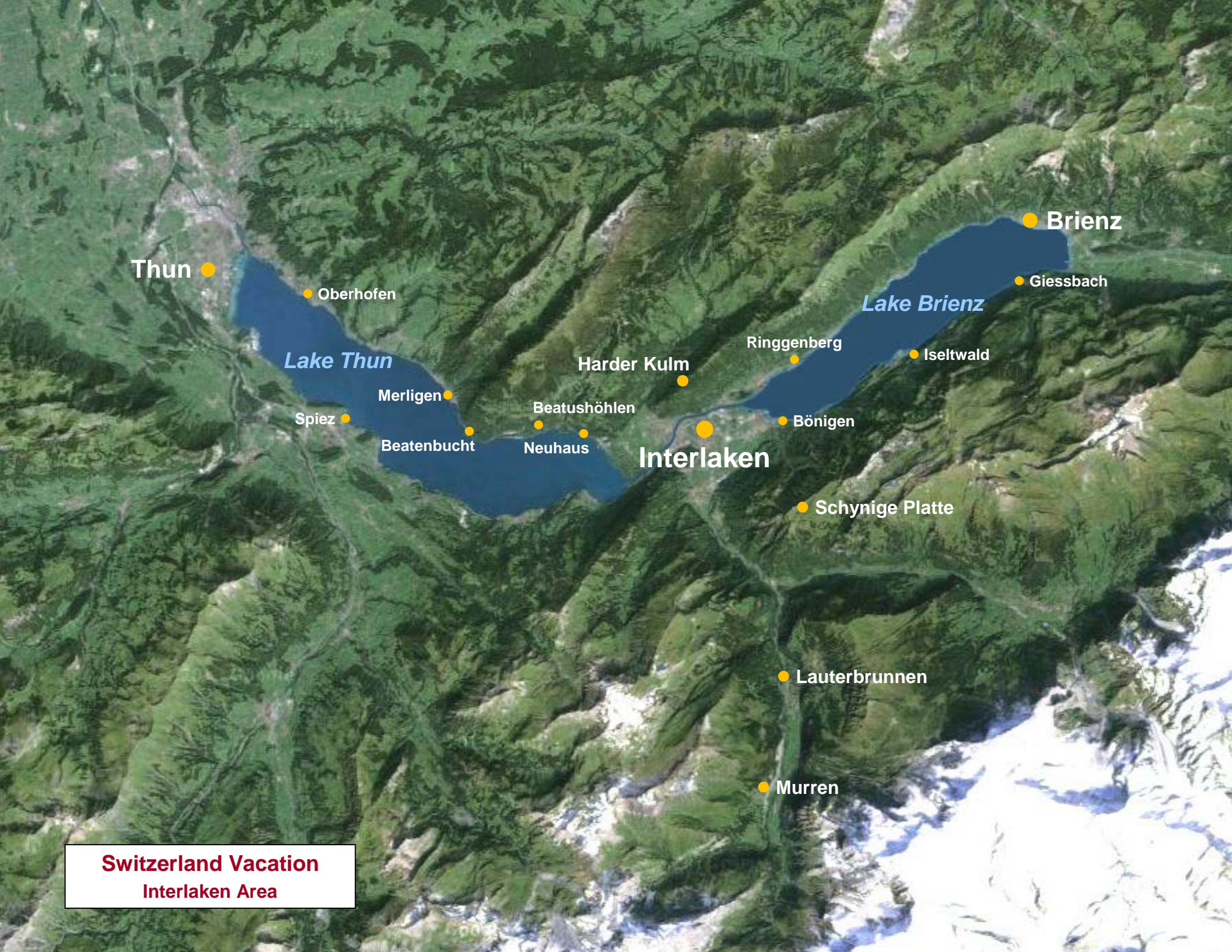
I visited the most famous sites on an earlier tour. This was a more relaxed visit. I stayed in Interlaken, the regional transportation hub, and made day excursions from there.

The photos from my longer tour are in the Switzerland-1 and -2 PDFs, and the ones from the first part of this trip are on the "Three Corners" page.

Bruce McKay



"Switzerland Vacation" was independent travel after the "Three Corners" European Castles Tour. Travel by rail, starting in Lucerne, staying mostly in Interlaken, and returning to Zurich via Bern. The dotted lines are the "Rain Day" rail route – Interlaken > Basel > Lucerne > back.



Thun

Oberhofen

Lake Thun

Merligen

Spiez

Beatenbucht

Beatushöhlen

Neuhaus

Harder Kulm

Interlaken

Ringgenberg

Bönigen

Schynige Platte

Lauterbrunnen

Murren

Lake Brienz

Brienz

Giessbach

Iseltwald

Switzerland Vacation
Interlaken Area



Welcome

This trip extension starts at Lucerne station.
My Swiss Pass covers trains, lake boats, and local transit.



Welcome

Approaching Lungern, en route to Interlaken



Welcome

Leaving Lungern



Interlaken

I'm staying at the friendly and conveniently-located Hotel du Lac, operated for two centuries by five generations of the Hoffmann family.



Interlaken

My room looks out over the Interlaken Ost (East) station, a busy rail hub connecting the main Swiss lines to those going up into the mountains.



Interlaken

This is also a busy international hub. Deutsche Bahn, the German national railway, operates eight trains between here and Berlin daily.



Interlaken

Interlaken is an adventure town. The streets are full of tourists, and the skies are full of paragliders.



Interlaken

The paragliders seem to be descending from a little castle in the sky.



Harder Kulm

Harder Kulm is actually a restaurant atop Interlaken's "own" mountain, and there's a funicular up to it across the river from the hotel.



Harder Kulm

On the 8-minute ride up there are glimpses of the lakes that Interlaken sits between ...



Harder Kulm ... and of the Lauterbrunnen Valley to the south ...



Harder Kulm ... and of the Bernese Alps.



Harder Kulm

Harder Kulm sits 2,480 feet / 755 metres above Interlaken.



Harder Kulm

Looking south-west towards Lake Thun.
New viewing platform at the extreme right.



Harder Kulm New viewing platform



Harder Kulm

**Looking south-east over Lake Brienz,
Interlaken Ost below**



Harder Kulm

Interlaken Ost.

↑ = Hotel du Lac



Lauterbrunnen I'm off to the village where I stayed last time.



Lauterbrunnen The U-shaped Lauterbrunnen Valley stretches 12 miles / 20 km south from Interlaken into the mountains.



Lauterbrunnen Lauterbrunnen has been settled at least since Roman times because of its strategic location. Population now is about 2,500.



Lauterbrunnen Staubbach Falls drops 1,000 feet / 300 metres from a cliff just south of Lauterbrunnen, seemingly emptying right into the village.



Lauterbrunnen At one time Lauterbrunnen was a mining village, but the building of the railway to the peak of the Jungfrau launched it as a popular tourist destination.



Lauterbrunnen Today, Lauterbrunnen's conventional tourism is boosted by the increasing popularity of hiking and active sports such as skiing, snowboarding, mountain biking, and paragliding.



Lauterbrunnen Best lunch in Switzerland at the Hotel Oberland.
Prices about half those in Zurich.



Murren

Lauterbrunnen is the launch point for a journey to a village on the cliffs above the valley. There is no road to Murren, just cable car access.



Murren

A 3-mile / 4-km rail link connects the upper cable station at Grütschalp, 2,265 feet / 690 metres above Lauterbrunnen, to Murren.



Murren

Murren had its roots as a farming village, but has grown with tourism, both summer and winter. Population 450. 2,000 hotel beds.



Murren

Tourism has been an important part of Murren's history since 1911, when the first British winter tourists arrived.



Murren

These cattle are nonchalantly grazing in the middle of the village, a few feet from the 1,950-foot / 600 metre drop to the valley below.



Murren

The village itself is picturesque ...



Murren

... and it provides the best views of the Bernese Alps peaks, here Eiger and Mönch.



Murren

The visible Sphinx portion of the Jungfrau complex.
(Details of my earlier visit are in [Switzerland-2007-2.pdf](#), pages 65-84.)



Murren

The Lauterbrunnen Valley is one of the deepest in the Alpine chain compared to the mountains that rise above it.



Murren

It's strange to be looking down at helicopters and paragliders.



Murren

But fun.



Lake Brienz

The dock for Lake Brienz boats is right next to the hotel and it's a nice day for a sail.



Lake Brienz

We head out a short channel into the lake.



Lake Brienz

Lake Brienz covers an area of 12 square miles / 30 square km.



Lake Brienz

We head first to Bönigen, a village of about 2,500 on the south shore.



Lake Brienz

Tourism is now the main activity in most of these villages.



Lake Brienz

Our cruise is like a commuter run. We stop at five villages on the way from Interlaken to Brienz.



Lake Brienz

We're not alone out here. The Lotschberg, the flagship of the Lake Brienz fleet, is a paddlewheel steamship that has been in service since 1914.



Lake Brienz A summer cottage near Ringgenberg



Lake Brienz Approaching Iseltwald



Lake Brienz

Commuter stop



Lake Brienz

We stop at the landing stage for the Grand Hotel Giessbach, built in 1873 and served by its own 1,130-foot / 345-m funicular.



Lake Brienz Headed towards Brienz near the end of the lake.



Lake Brienz

The dock at Brienz is connected to the rail station so I can take the quick way home.



**Schynige
Platte**

This will be mountain climbing the easy way, and 19th century open carriages will make en-route photography possible.



**Schynige
Platte**

This cogwheel railway takes 50 minutes to travel up the 5-mile / 7-km route to the Schynige Platte station.



**Schynige
Platte**

In the early stages we climb through Beech and Silver Fir forest.



**Schynige
Platte**

The Schynige Platte Railway began operation in 1893.
The maximum gradient is 25 %.



**Schynige
Platte**

Operation was converted from steam to electric in 1914, though one of the original steam locomotives is still in service.



**Schynige
Platte**

View of Interlaken, from the south.
↙ = hotel.



**Schynige
Platte**

Lake Brienz



**Schynige
Platte**

We're second in a convoy of two trains.



**Schynige
Platte**

Lake Thun



**Schynige
Platte**

We emerge from the Spruce forest
onto the alpine meadows.



**Schynige
Platte**

↓ = Harder Kulm



**Schynige
Platte**

And eventually the meadows give way to the mountains.



**Schynige
Platte**

**Wetterhorn, Schreckhorn, and Eiger,
average 12,860 feet / 3,920 metres.**



**Schynige
Platte**

Arrival at Schynige Platte Station



**Schynige
Platte**

Schreckhorn, 13,380 feet / 4,080 metres



**Schynige
Platte**

This is a good spot for paragliding too ...



**Schynige
Platte**

... so we have company on our way back down.



Lake Thun

Time for a cruise on the other lake.
But first a safety regulation.



Lake Thun

No walking on the water.



Lake Thun

The same company operates this fleet of lake boats, with similar itineraries.



Lake Thun

Lake Thun is larger than Brienz.
It's area is 19 square miles / 48 square km.



Lake Thun

First stop is Neuhaus.



Lake Thun

Neuhaus park. This is the most relaxed form of sightseeing I've ever found.



Lake Thun

Beatushöhlen



Lake Thun

Beatenbucht



Lake Thun

Merligen



Lake Thun

Parts of the medieval castle at Spiez date from the 13th century.



Lake Thun

Vineyards at Spiez



Lake Thun

The castle at Oberhofen dates back to the early 13th century.



Lake Thun

Oberhofen commuter stop,
one of ten en route to Thun.



Lake Thun

The paddlesteamer Blümlisalp entered service in 1906.



Lake Thun

The big mansions and manicured lawns signal that we're approaching the city of Thun and the end of this cruise.



Rain Day

Rather than sit out a rainy day at the hotel I took trains up to Basel, down to Lucerne, and then back. Interesting, though not great for photography.



To Zurich

**I'm on my way back to Zurich to get organized for my return flight.
View from the train, between Thun and Bern.**



To Zurich

Passing through Bern.



Zurich

Yes, Zurich is a big city, but it is quite civilized.
Extensive pedestrian zones, and relentlessly efficient transit.



Zurich

I arrive on a Friday, and discover that chaotic preparations are underway for a major party on the weekend.



Lake Zurich

But there's a fleet of lake boats here and it's probably peaceful out on the lake.



Lake Zurich

**We leave old town Zurich behind
for a short round trip on the lake.**



Lake Zurich

On the way out we pass barges being loaded with fireworks for Saturday night.



Lake Zurich

An important Swiss historic site. The world headquarters of the Lindt & Sprüngli AG chocolate empire.



Lake Zurich

Commuter stop. One of nine.



Lake Zurich Zollikon



Lake Zurich

When we return it turns out the party is already starting. I'm headed home early tomorrow, but that's OK. I've already had a great time.

< End >

 **Switzerland Vacation**