

Grindelwald, Switzerland

By Angela Verrier

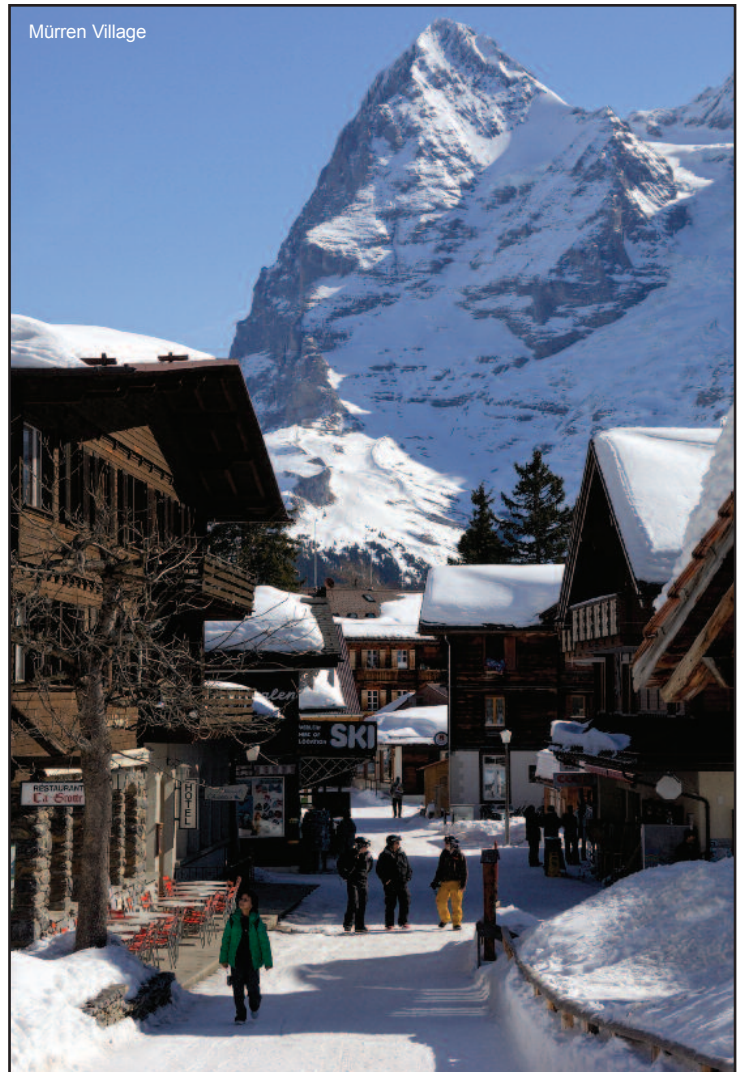
No doubt we've unknowingly laid eyes on the snow-covered, glistening peaks that surround this quaint Swiss treasure as it has been used as a backdrop for many scenes in the wildly famous Harry Potter films. The village of Grindelwald, nestled in the Bernese Alps of pristine Switzerland, boasts a plethora of stunning mountainscapes and outdoor activities. The natural landscape provides the ultimate setting for winter sports and has become an international, year-round playground for those seeking both excitement and serenity.

Famed for its beauty and splendor, Grindelwald has attracted travelers since the end of the 18th century. Road, railway and cableway systems have made this breathtaking destination accessible for international voyagers seeking a taste of Alpine paradise. Located in central Switzerland on the north face of the Eiger, Grindelwald lies only 98 miles from the Zurich airport. By train, Interlaken offers the nearest major connection. The Bernese Oberland Railway operates a regular service from Interlaken to Grindelwald.

Three impressive peaks surround the valley of Grindelwald – the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau. The largest ski resort in the Jungfrau region, Grindelwald has two main ski areas: Wengen, offering nearly 100 miles of pistes with around 30 lifts reaching altitudes of over 8,000 feet, and Schilthorn, near the village of Mürren, ensconced at nearly 10,000 feet and reachable only by cog railway or cable car. Fast, modern ski lifts are being added and upgraded to enhance the downhill skiing experience. The 12 sports shops in the region make renting equipment easy.

One of the most spectacular peaks in the Jungfrau region is the popular Lauberhorn near Wengen, renowned for mid-January's International Lauberhorn Race, the longest World Cup run in the world. In late January, Grindelwald hosts the Inferno Ski Race, the longest and "craziest" amateur ski race with almost 10 miles of contrasting downhill terrain.

Even for non-skiers, Grindelwald offers a myriad of possibilities. Grindelwald has over 50 miles of winter walking trails with views of lofty peaks and majestic glaciers, as well as toboggan runs, including one of the longest in the Alps. Snowshoeing off the beaten path, into untouched, power-white snow, is a popular activity. Tour guides are



available or explorers can venture into wilderness on marked trails. Many exciting parks are opening to free-style skiers and snowboarders, offering heart-pumping jumps, rails and pipes.

Guest accommodations in Grindelwald are now more impressive than ever. Most hotels, including the Bergus Bort, a family-run hotel offering a cozy but modern chalet feel, have recently been renovated. These renovations are also helping save the planet by using eco-friendly, carbon-neutral energy sources. Most hotels provide views of the Eiger.

Also popular in Grindelwald is the Velogemel, a bicycle-like sled. Grindelwald is the only place in the world these sleds

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are used as a customary mode of transportation. Even postmen, farmers and doctors ride a Velogemel to get around the mountain terrain. The first Velogemel was invented over 100 years ago in this region, and the Velogemel World Championships are held annually in early February in Grindelwald. These sleds are sold as a rarity to fans looking to claim a piece of Grindelwald's rich history. Many nearby villages, including Mürren, are car-free, making the Velogemel quite useful.

Experience the eternal ice and snow on a train trip to the Jungfrauoch, site of the highest railroad station in the world (11,332 feet). This scenic cog railway excursion, tunneling through the Eiger and the Mönch, ventures into the Ice Palace, an icy cavern housing magnificent ice sculptures. The full-day roundtrip from Interlaken makes a stop in Grindelwald.

Grindelwald hosts the well-known Festival International des Neiges, which is held for one week in January on a natural skating rink in the heart of the village, bringing teams together from different countries to create ice and snow sculptures. Locals enjoy the Alpine Cheese Festival in early September, which begins with the arrival of the cows in the morning, celebrating farmers,

dairies and the end of a plentiful summer. Dining on the celebrated fondue, made from fresh local cheese, or sipping Switzerland's finest wine and beer is the perfect way to spend the evening in front of the fire after an exhilarating day on the slopes.

Contact: myswitzerland.com



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