



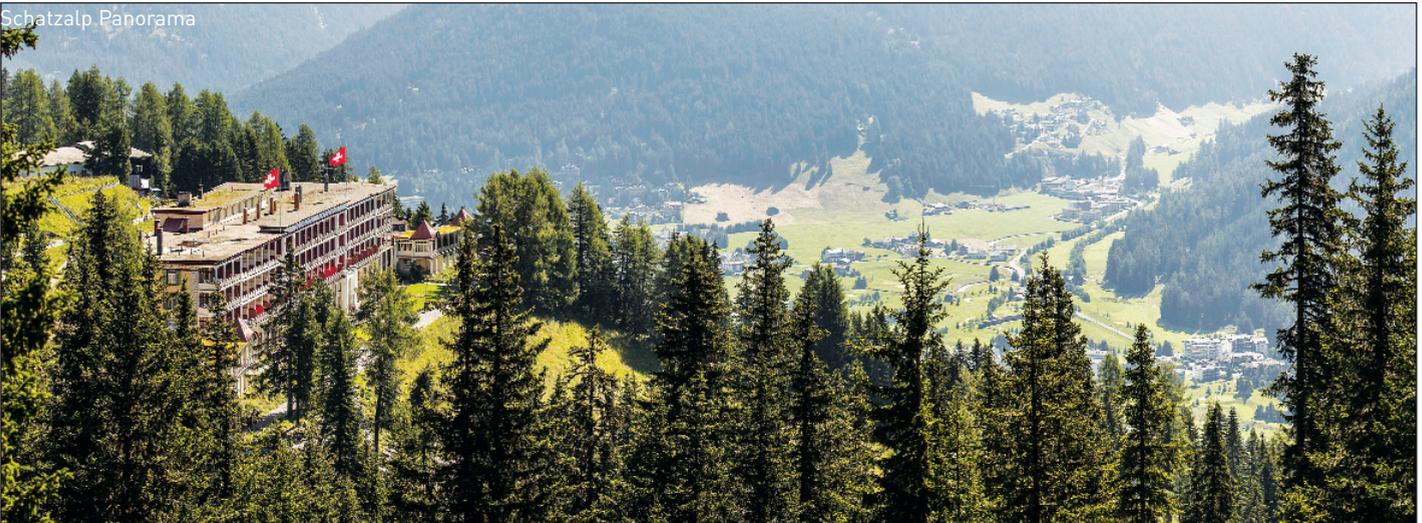
View from the rooms at the Schatzalp Hotel

# *The Hills Are Alive*

**ANANYA BAHL** HOPS ONTO AN ICONIC TRAIN IN SWITZERLAND TO DISCOVER THAT THIS MOUNTAIN COUNTRY ALWAYS HAS A NEW STORY TO TELL, NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES YOU'VE VISITED IT



Schatzalp Panorama



“Slow and steady wins the race”—so the adage goes. It couldn’t be truer than for this journey that we are taking you on. Here, bullet trains and other high-speed contraptions fade into oblivion as you are transported into a world of mountains and meadows that are reposing in an indulgent way—far removed from the concerns of everyday life. In a world of such beauty, slowly snaking its way through “highs” and “lows” is the Bernina Express train: panoramic, running on a UNESCO-listed line, and revealing its secrets in a strictly unhurried manner. We are all aware of a certain blockbuster Hindi movie

Switzerland. Playground for the world’s biggest influencers, it is host to the annual World Economic Forum. However, on my visit, there’s none of that political humdrum. Instead, it looks like a film set from the 70s: colourful buildings are perched amongst flowering trees, the main street is buzzing with cute coffee establishments (try Kaffee Klatsch), chocolatiers galore (Schneider’s for a fun DIY session), and there’s a certain small-town flavour to be savoured. After checking into the Sunstar Hotel Davos—no visit to this city is complete without a healing immersion at its wellness centre—I head to the magical Schatzalp. Made

a-view here is mandatory! Willem Jan Holsboer, the sanatorium’s founder felt a jolt of positivity when he was surveying this land before construction, and later when the Bovis-Biometer was invented, there was scientific proof that it did give out “good vibes” (whatever lies above 6,500 Bovis units is good—some areas of the Schatzalp measure about 26,000 units!). Sipping my coffee, looking out at the glorious Rhaetian Alps, I feel a surge of goodness and now I know there’s scientific backing to it! This is not the only “high” to be enjoyed in Davos. The Swiss love their chocolate, but, did you know that they’re also master brewers?



Bernina Express



Bernina Express

which, till date, makes die-hard romantics swoon over a love story that blossomed on a train somewhere in Switzerland. While this isn’t the same story, it is similar: of falling in love with the mountains, and as I learnt, even yourself!

My journey begins in Davos in the Graubünden canton of eastern

famous by Thomas Mann’s novel, *The Magic Mountain*, it can be accessed from the main road via a short and picturesque funicular ride.

The Berghotel Schatzalp sits here today where a huge sanatorium once stood, healing the aches and pains of several famous people. There’s a lovely panoramic restaurant and botanical garden, and a coffee-with-

The BierVision Monstein brewery, at 1625 metres above sea level, is among the highest breweries in Europe. Locals have invested in it and they earn dividends in beer! I sample some good stuff before heading to Clavadeteralp where a cheese-making tour is waiting for me at 2028 metres up above. It can be accessed by cable car (or a hike), and it’s here that alpine cheese,

**THE TRAIN RUNS THROUGH THE ALBULA AND BERNINA LINES, AND MANEUVERS 55 TUNNELS, 196 BRIDGES, AND 70 PER MILLE INCLINES WITH MUCH APLOMB**



The BierVision Monstein Brewery in Davos

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Kaffe Klatsch in Davos

butter, yogurt, and local goodies like Birnenbrot (a kind of stuffed pear-and-raisin bread) are to be savoured. There's much to be enjoyed at Klosters—a small town about half an hour away from Davos—which was once Princess Diana's favorite ski resort. After a little bit of hiking and a gorgeous meal at Skihütte Selfranga (great bratwurst and risotto, amazing views, and a chance to tee-off at the Klosters Golf Course), I head back to hop onto my train.

The Bernina Express waits for me at Davos Platz station. Bright red, sporting panoramic glass

serpentine manner which means that you could lose orientation: what's on the left will actually be the right and vice versa, but, as I am reassured soon enough, the expert behind the commentary knows it all! This is the highest railway across the alps and it connects northern and southern Europe, linking different languages and cultures along the way.

The unfolding scenery is reminiscent of my childhood, when I watched Heidi episodes and wondered where I could find such beautiful landscapes! The train runs through the Albula and



A typical home in Klosters

windows, and raring-to-go, it's scheduled to take me on a UNESCO-listed journey up till St. Moritz. Its beauty lies in its pace: it is not a rack railway system, so the trip is slow with background commentary that notifies you when an important sight is being passed. The train sneaks in a circular,

Bernina lines, and maneuvers 55 tunnels, 196 bridges, and 70 per mille inclines with much aplomb. Its construction is nothing short of an architectural feat. The Landwasser Viaduct stands out as a glorious design achievement, built between 1901-02. In between, we stop at the

iconic Alp Grüm for photos and a meal: it is the only restaurant in the world with a train station!

When we reach St. Moritz, home to the world's rich and famous, chocolates at Hanselmann and Hauser wait for me. I can sense a shift in culture from the German-speaking Davos to the more Italian-centric St. Moritz—but, guess what? We are still in Switzerland! After a

short tour of the city, including an almost-unending photo spree at St. Moritz Lake, I head to the Waldhaus Sils Maria—a peaceful, luxurious, family-run haven that's to be my home for the next few days.

A majority of us travel to reach a destination but oft, the journey becomes our arrival point. That was true for the Bernina Express route—it symbolises discovery, and the child-

like wonder of its passengers as they wait to spot upcoming sights is almost tangible. It also proves that all travel needn't be about tiresome long-haul flights and infinite airport delays. Not only are you moving towards your destination, but the journey is also pampering you with several marvellous sights: now, that's a sure-shot win-win situation in my book!



## DID YOU KNOW?

### Living it Up in St. Moritz

In the old days, St. Moritz had a tea-coffee-and-caviar culture. It was common to stop by a cafe for a combination of these three. Make sure to stop by Glattfelder, a shop-cum-cafe, for a taste of nostalgia. While you are here, make time to visit the Diavolezza and Muottas Muragl mountains for spectacular views.



### Must-dos in Davos

A meal at Alpenhof restaurant is a must-do in Davos. Savour authentic Italian cuisine in the heart of German-speaking Switzerland as Chef Roberto regales you with his culinary prowess.

Shop authentic cheeses and Davos's famed Bündnerfleisch meat at Gourmet Käch on the promenade.



Bündnerfleisch - a dried meat - speciality of the region - at Alpenhof, Davos

### Hearken to History!

In St. Moritz town, you will find the concrete bust of a certain Johann Badrutt. He was a local hotelier who, about 150 years ago, made a bet with his guests one summer. He claimed that winters in the Engadin were far better than those in cold and wet London. Inviting his English guests to stay through the winter, he promised to cover their travel expenses in case they did not enjoy it. As it turned out, they loved it, and stayed until Easter. Thus, winter tourism in St. Moritz was born and the town still secures its spot as one of the best winter destinations in the world to this day.