

# SCENES FROM SWITZERLAND

From a classic James Bond flick to the more recent *The Bourne Identity*, scenic Switzerland has been a backdrop for more movies than there are blades in a Swiss army knife, writes **Ellen Boonstra**.



Even if you're not racing down a ski slope being chased by a pack of evil villains like James Bond in the 1969 movie *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, there's plenty of action for adrenaline seekers in the Swiss Alps. Few places on the planet are as breathtaking as this mountain range and offer such a wide range of sports all year round, whether it's snowboarding in Davos, summer skiing on the glaciers of Zermatt or hiking around the Matterhorn in springtime.

Schilthorn Mountain, in the snowcapped Bernese Oberland region of the country, featured prominently in the 1969 James Bond classic. Perched atop its 2,970-meter-high peak lies the famed Piz Gloria restaurant which avid Bond fans will recognize as the site of the bad guy Blofeld's headquarters. After Bond's cover is blown, our suave hero orchestrates a blood-curdling escape from the complex by skiing down the mountainside with Blofeld and his sidekicks in hot pursuit. In recent years the restaurant building and cable cars have been renovated but the location is

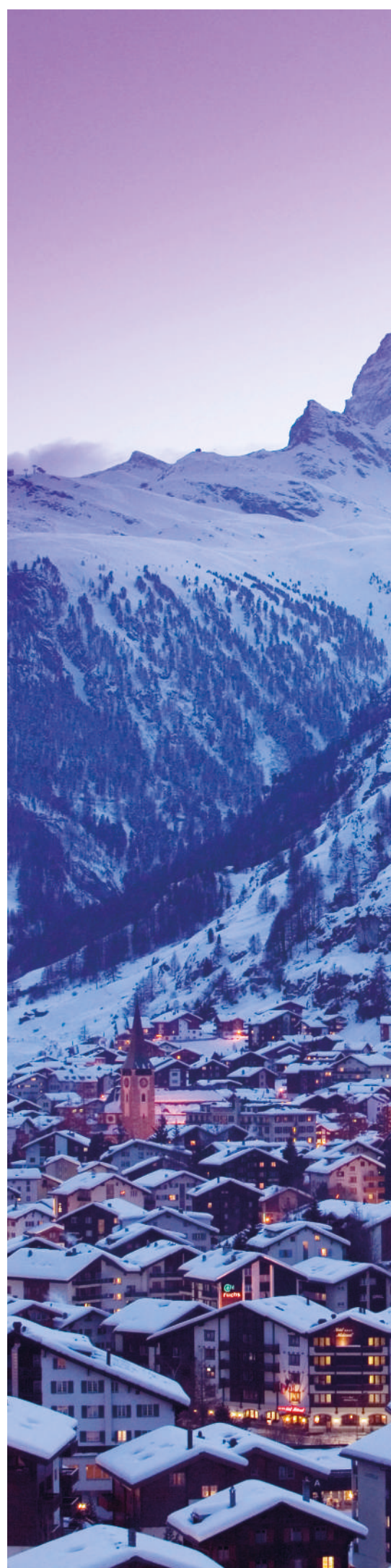
still a spectacular place to visit, any time of the year.

## Glamorous Gstaad

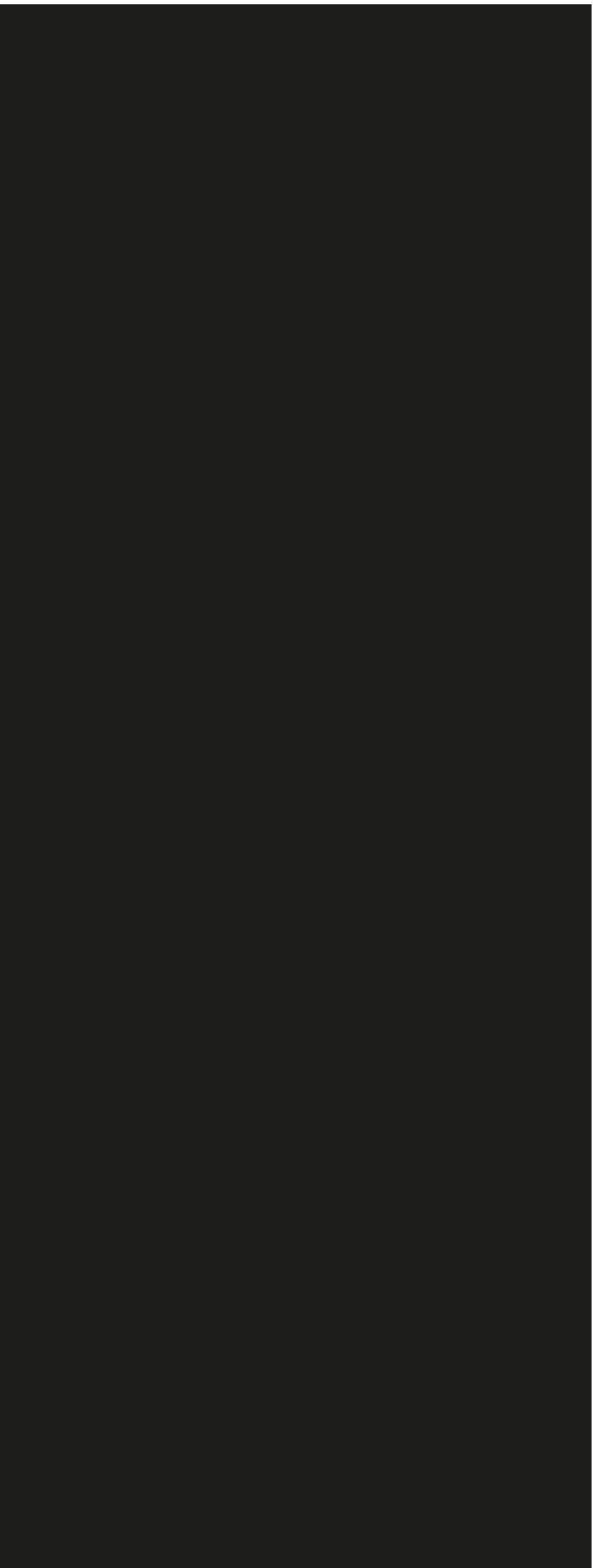
Gstaad has formed the backdrop of many a paparazzi shot of the rich and famous since Hollywood A-listers started frequenting this picture-perfect mountain resort back in the 60s. The area surrounding Gstaad comprises six independent ski regions, boasting 250 kilometers of pistes, sled rides, snow parks and gorgeous hiking routes up to 3,000 meters, as well as the longest skiing descent in the country.

For those who prefer to remain on

**Clockwise from above: Hot-air balloon ready to lift off in Gstaad; view of Zermatt and Matterhorn; Piz Gloria atop the Schilthorn in the Swiss Alps**









## Toblerone, the triangular Swiss chocolate bar you may have just purchased at the duty-free shop, also comes from Bern

more solid footing, the alpine town offers ample opportunity for apres-ski entertainment. It's an unforgettable experience to take a stroll along the shopping promenade with its exclusive boutiques, the grand hotels and chalets with their intricately carved facades, especially in winter when the storefronts and exteriors are lit up with Christmas lights. The promenade is where you can warm up over hot chocolate at Charly's Tea Room or stock up on local delicacies like fresh foie gras at Pernet market.

### Captivating Capital

From Gstaad and its many attractions, it's just a two-hour drive to Bern, the capital of Switzerland. Situated along the Aar, the country's longest river, this hilly city has quite a few attractions of its own. Inscribed in 1983 as a UNESCO World Heritage site, the city of Bern is one of Europe's best-preserved examples of medieval town architecture. Touring around the city with its stately Gothic-style buildings, century-old churches and stone fountains, it's not hard to imagine how knights once roamed these parts saving damsels in distress. We can easily picture Bern as the ideal stage set for a historical drama, although these days the action is mostly found at the Stadttheater, the city's opera house and theater.

Bern's checklist of charms do not end here. Toblerone, the triangular Swiss

chocolate bar you may have just purchased at the duty-free shop, also comes from Bern. First concocted there some 100 years ago, this popular gift item contains almonds, nougat, honey and chocolate although its exact recipe remains a well-guarded secret.

### Bank Secrets

Though often based more on fiction than fact, many a suspense and heist film portrays Swiss banks and secret numbered accounts in an intriguing light. In *The Bourne Identity*, for example, the amnesiac hero (Matt Damon) starts out with no clue to his identity except the details of a Swiss bank account, while in *The Da Vinci Code* the two main characters (Tom Hanks and Audrey Tautou) enter a Swiss bank to retrieve mysterious items locked in a safe deposit box.

Certainly there's no shortage of treasures to be discovered in Zurich, the nation's most populous city as well as the one with the largest number of financial institutions. Coincidentally, Thai Airways' gateway into this German-speaking metropolis is characterized by a well-preserved Old Town, a trendy new quarter, a rich array of over 50 museums and more than 100 art galleries, complemented by kinetic nightlife.

Among its historic monuments not to be missed are the Fraumunster Church



and the 13th-century St Peter's Church.

### A Touch of Pizzazz

It's undoubtedly one of Switzerland's most fascinating characteristics that for the price of one, you can visit three very different regions, each with its own language and distinct cultural traits. The thriller/comedy *Silver Bears* (1978), starring Michael Caine, takes place in Lugano, the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino. The plot involves a pizza restaurant, mobsters and a love affair, alluding to the Italian nature of this canton.

Needless to say, some of the country's finest Italian restaurants can be found here like La Terrazza which offers panoramic views of Lake Lugano. Dubbed the 'Monte Carlo of Switzerland' because of the increasing number of celebrities it attracts, Lugano combines the best of what Switzerland has to offer - a delectable cuisine, polyglot culture and a scenery so cinematic that it keeps turning actors and filmmakers into drama kings and queens. ❁

### SMOOTH AS SILK

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Above right: Bern cityscape; Lake Lugano, Left: Fraumunster Church in Zurich