

SWISS BLISS

From the dreamy backdrop of the Alps to the super-lux shopping and rich culture, Zürich offers the perfect winter escape, writes **JILLIAN BOLGER**.

Zürich is the rarest of cities: a multicultural enclave that's historically rich yet excitingly modern; proudly traditional yet unashamedly edgy. Hidden, somewhat unfairly, in the shadows of other European heavy-hitters, Zürich is the kind of well-kept secret you just want to share. Less showy than the obvious Paris-Amsterdam-Rome hotspots, Switzerland's largest and wealthiest city is quietly self-assured. Take a chance on the waterside charmer, and prepare to lose your heart amongst its river walks, medieval lanes, chocolate boutiques and soaring spires.

There's something extra special about a city on a lake, and Lake Zürich or Zürichsee, is a beauty. Vast and clear, its pristine waters stretch south, their ebbing expanse kissed by the purest mountain air. Long and deep, the lake's furthest shores are encircled by a chocolate box vista of snow-capped peaks that typify Switzerland's fabled scenery. Iconic and majestic, the Swiss Alps are the most delicious backdrop to a city break, shimmering lilac and silver and blue in the winter sun.

We've come for a romantic weekend, which can only mean one thing: checking into the impossibly stylish Baur au Lac. The hotel has been owned by the same family since 1844. Kings, emperors and aristocrats all flocked to the city to

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ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY BY ZÜRICH TOURISM AND GETTY IMAGES



Zürich's waterfront along the River Limmat is a feast for the eyes.
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT The Grand Café Lochergut in District 4; Café Schober; Zürich is a beautiful tangle of cobbled lanes and ornate architecture; city favourite Kronenhalle has been feeding creatives and intellectuals since 1924; the opulent Le Hall at the five-star Baur au Lac; the waterside hotel makes a dreamy hideaway in winter

enjoy the legendary Baur hospitality at this Swiss landmark, and 175 years on, this handsome waterside five-star is still in favour with royalty and low-key celebrities, all drawn to the discreet service and delightfully opulent rooms.

Immaculately tricked out in lavish fabrics, artworks and furniture, Baur makes a dreamy hideaway on a winter's day. Our corner suite looks out onto the private gardens, which run down to the lake. In summer, you'll find the Baur beehives, fashioned like a miniature hotel, its residents busily making the honey for breakfast; in winter, the lawns are cloaked in snow, creating a winter wonderland twinkling with fairy lights.

Afternoon tea in the hotel's opulent Le Hall – a jewel-like salon lit by a historic chandelier – is a Zürich rite of passage, all pretty pastries and glamorous locals, and the ultimate in cosy. In summer, the sun-kissed Terrasse is the place to be seen. It's lovely for al fresco lunches and evening cocktails, and you ►



GUTEN APPETIT!

Zürich's hottest culinary spots

Café, bistro, bar and restaurant, the chic **GRAND CAFÉ LOCHERGUT** (lochergut.net) in District 4 is perfect for everything from brunch to small plates or killer cocktails. You'll find great modern Asian cooking in the industrial chic of **LILY'S FACTORY ZÜRICH** (lilys.ch) or, for a slice of history, try dinner and drinks (and Picasso on the walls) at city favourite **KRONENHALLE** (kronenhalle.ch), which has been feeding creatives and intellectuals since 1924. Don't miss coffee, cakes and hot chocolate in the magical **CAFÉ SCHOBER** (cafe1842.ch), a gorgeous institution serving treats since 1842. For a chilled-out Michelin-starred dinner with incredible wines, **MAISON MANESSE** is the height of hip (maisonmanesse.ch).





CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT
The Museum Haus Konstruktiv is the leading institution for constructivist, concrete and conceptual art in Switzerland; designer boutique Vestibule stocks an elegant range of clothing and accessories in its two Zürich stores; glossy department store Grieder; the 12th century Grossmünster church

can chill out here and people watch, all the while cooled by the breeze from the lake. But our favourite spot is the Restaurant Pavillon: swoonsome in its beauty, it's a two-star Michelin restaurant by night, but in the morning serves as the ultimate breakfast salon, easing guests into the day in utter luxury.

Small and perfectly formed, Zürich's medieval heart sits along the River Limmat, a beautiful tangle of cobbled lanes and ornate architecture, courtyards and churches. The waterfront is a feast for the eyes, with striking Baroque guildhalls which now house stylish restaurants. This Niederdorf district houses the landmark Grossmünster, a twin-towered 12th century church that dominates the city skyline. The birthplace of the Swiss-German Reformation, Grossmünster's foreboding interior is worth a peep inside. Nearby Schipfe, one of the city's oldest quarters, has gone from pre-Roman settlement to 16th century centre of the city's silk industry to its place as a picturesque riverside strip populated by artists, craft shops and cute cafés.

Shopping in Zürich is a national pastime, with the long, leafy Bahnhofstrasse the jewel in the affluent city's crown. Stretching from the lakeside to the historic main train station, this famous mile-long boulevard was designed to impress, with its handsome 19th century architecture and wide paths. Today, it's one of the world's most exclusive shopping streets, lined with the biggest global brands, from haute couture designers to Swiss watchmakers, glossy department stores like Grieder and Globus, and high-end chocolatiers like (our favourite) Läderach. It's an expensive spot to flex your credit card, but it's a joy to explore, and the window shopping is free, and *almost* as much fun.



Like the cooler, edgier sister of Bern and Geneva, Zürich's always been a rule-breaker. Since the Middle Ages, the city has been known to do things its own way. The birthplace of the radical Dada art movement and, later, Constructivism, Zürich once counted James Joyce, Wagner, Lenin and Einstein amongst its citizens. These creative and intellectual seams run deep, and the city is still a hotbed of artistic, cultural and academic endeavours.

With 50 museums and dozens of world-class galleries, Zürich offers a feast for culture vultures... or those hiding from the snow. Should you fancy a romp outdoors, wrap up warm and make for Uetliberg, Zürich's little mountain. It's a wildflower and walker's haven in summer; but in winter, you can take the train up top, enjoy the panoramic views, then hire sleighs and toboggans down the 3.1km run through the woods!

At the foothills of Uetliberg, you'll find Züri-West, an edgy, former industrial quarter that's become the beating heart of the cultural and night life scene. Originally a rundown area of warehouses and factories, the Industriequartier has been transformed into the hippest neighbourhood in town, and cool new residential area. Dominated by the dramatic railway viaduct, built in 1894, the huge arches are filled with independent design stores, boutiques, galleries, vintage shops, restaurants and bars. Be sure to visit the Markthalle, a lively indoor food market offering everything from delicious farmhouse cheese and charcuterie. Then hop a tram back to Baur au Lac, for a luxurious bubble bath overlooking the lake. ■

THE DETAILS

Jillian was a guest of Baur au Lac. Rooms are available from CHF 870 (approx €791) per night, based on two adults sharing a Deluxe Double room on a room-only basis. Book at bauraulac.ch. For free or reduced access to 40 museums and free transport, invest in a ZürichCARD (from tourist offices, information desks in the airport or online at zuerich.com, from €27). For more information on Zürich, visit zuerich.com.

Aer Lingus and Swiss fly direct to Zürich from Dublin.