

# BURT WOLF TRAVELS & TRADITIONS EASTERN SWITZERLAND

The eastern part of Switzerland is one of the best kept secrets in European travel. It's picturesque and uncrowded. It has one of the most interesting Baroque abbeys in the nation. There's an ancient textile and craft tradition that makes it a great place to shop. The food is good and anyone interested in the great outdoors will love the neighborhood—though 1500 years ago it had a few problems.



St. Gallus was an Irish monk who came here in 612. Not that there was anything attractive to attract you here. But that in fact was the precise point. In those days if you wanted to assure yourself great accommodations in the afterlife, you had to have horrible accommodations in your present life and things around here were pretty horrible. It was the perfect neighborhood for a monk on his way to sainthood.

After the monk's death, a Benedictine Abbey was founded on the spot where he died and during the next two hundred years it became one of the most powerful monasteries in



Europe. It was the most important educational institution north of the Alps.

During the mid-1700s a cathedral was built. The design is known as Bodensee Baroque and the guiding principal for its architect was "more is never enough" and baroque was the condition the abbey was in after they paid the architect's bill.

Just in case you're ever looking for something in Bodensee Baroque, the way to spot it is to check out the pillars and the spot where they connect to the ceiling. The white part of the pillar represents life on earth. The area where the tops of the pillars of life meet the golden glow of the afterlife is always painted a light green. The ceiling filled with frescoes represents the afterlife. The light green bands were designed to signal an easy and pleasant transition between life and death and death and the afterlife. What American economists call a "soft landing." The cathedral also has two organs that were built with a unique system that allows the music from one organ to

come out of both sets of pipes and among the relics, the cathedral has the bell that St. Gallus brought here from Ireland. It's the oldest bell in Europe. But ask not for whom the bell tolls—no one is allowed to ring it.

The room where the scribes worked was part of the original abbey and laid the foundation for one of the world's most famous libraries. Built in 1758, it contains more than 150,000 books from and about the Middle Ages. The books are arranged according to different scientific fields of study. The angel at the top of each section is dressed to reflect the particular science dealt with in the books below. It's still a working library for scholars studying the Middle Ages.



The library is also considered to be the cradle of the German language. It was here that Latin was first translated and written in the High German dialect. Before the St. Gallen translations, German was spoken but not written.

## THE TOWN OF ST. GALLEN

The town that grew up around the monastery is known as St. Gallen. During the Middle Ages, workers in the convent wove linen of such excellent quality that it was exported throughout Europe and by the 1400s the town was a prosperous textile center for linen, cotton and embroidery. You can still see some of the more bizarre results of the town's wealth.

As soon as you hit the big time you built yourself a town house with a big bay window up front. And you used the design of the window to indicate your wealth and power. One example was built in 1707 with a figure representing each of the continents. It was a way for the owner to indicate that his business was worldwide. Australia, however, is missing, because at the time, Australia had not yet been discovered.



It was also common to have a face on the bay window with its tongue sticking out—it was designed to send a message to your neighbors—I'm richer than you

are. My favorite bay window shows Hercules holding the weight of the world on his shoulders. It was how the owner of the building indicated that he had a higher education and had read the classics. In order to appreciate the architecture of St. Gallen you must look up.

## AKRIS

Over the centuries, much of St. Gallen's success has come from the fashion business and it still has a great house. It's known as Akris and it is the only remaining couture house where the designs are made and produced in Switzerland.

It was founded in 1922 by Alice Kriemler-Schock. Her children had grown up and gone off on their own and she was bored. So she began sewing aprons and selling them to her friends.



Over the years, the company grew into a manufacturer of high-end ready-to-wear, while producing couture clothing for famous designers in Paris.

At the age of 20, Alice's grandson Albert was brought in to take over as the designer of their own label. Albert's work has given the house an international reputation for outstanding designs.

Albert is respectful of St. Gallen's history as a center of embroidery and often consults the family archive of fashion periodicals and vintage pieces. His signature clothes mix classic embroidery with modern fabrics and design.

## BIBER BAKING

The people in St. Gallen are also rather artful about their gastronomy. One of their specialties is a cookie called a biber. It originated in the Abbey of St. Gallen, but these days it's produced by a number of bakeries around town. I sampled them at the Roggwiler Café and Tea Room, which is a great place to stop in for a morning coffee or an afternoon tea and taste the cookies, cakes, and chocolates.

The master biber baker is Mr. Bär who has been baking bibers for more than forty years. The ancient technique starts with a sheet of ginger bread dough that is pressed into a decorative mold. Then the molded sheet is covered with a sheet of marzipan. The marzipan is topped with a second sheet of gingerbread—it's really a marzipan sandwich on gingerbread and it's delicious.



## ZUM GOLDENEN SCHAFLI

A few blocks away from Roggwillers, is a building that during the Middle Ages housed the Butcher's Guild. Today, the second floor of the building houses the restaurant Zum Goldenen Schafli, which means "the golden lamb."



## WHAT TO DO IN EASTERN SWITZERLAND

### APPENZELL MUSEUM

HAUPTGASSE 4  
CH-9050 APPENZELL  
TEL: +41 (0)71 788 96 31  
[WWW.AI.CH](http://WWW.AI.CH)

### CHÄS-SUTTER GMBH - CHEESE SHOP

MARKTGASSE 8  
CH-9050 APPENZELL  
TEL: +41 (0)71 787 13 33

### MUJA GLASS DESIGN SWITZERLAND

FRED MEYER  
PULVEMÜHLESTR., 20  
CH-7000 CHUR  
TEL: +41 (0)81 284 41 77

### ROGER DÖRIG METALWORK

KUNSTGEWERBE - GÜRTLEREI  
POSTSTRASSE 6  
CH-9050 APPENZELL  
TEL: +41 (0)71 787 11 82  
[WWW.MYAPPENELL.COM](http://WWW.MYAPPENELL.COM)

### JOHANNES FUCHS - DULCIMER MAKER

SCHREINEREI HACKBRETTBAU  
NOLLISWEID 3  
CH-9050 APPENZELL  
TEL: +41 (0)71 787 44 01  
[WWW.HACKBRETT.CH](http://WWW.HACKBRETT.CH)



The ceilings are low and made of the original wood. Like many things that are old, the building tends to sag a bit. The room is so slanted that the restaurant has developed a slanted glass to even things out. The kitchen specializes in fish and their signature dish is sole gratineed with rice. Another local favorite is St. Gallen Bratwurst and when wurst comes to wurst, these are the best. They're served with rosti which is the national potato dish. Strips of potato that have been parboiled and pan fried on both sides into a disk.

## APPENZELL

Appenzell was founded when a group of monks from St. Gallen decided to move out of town. First thing they did was to look for a place to store their stuff. They found a nice cellar and put everything inside it. The Latin word for "the abbot's cellar" is Appenzell and that's what the place is called.

The Appenzell Museum is the present repository for a considerable amount of local stuff. The top floor is devoted to the working tools of Appenzell that are made of wood. A very distinct and creative style and in one way or another they are all related to cows. The floor below has a collection of traditional Appenzell furniture. All of which is normally used to rest on



after you've been working with your cows. The main floor gets right to the point—paintings of cows. And people who own cows. And fields in which cows have grazed. And snow through which cows have walked. You get the point.

The canton that surrounds all this stuff is famous for hanging on to old traditions. They still use an ancient system of voting.

On Election Day, everyone gathers in the town square. The proposed laws are read and a vote is called. You raise your hand and the secretary general estimates the total vote.

The system is simple, straightforward, easy to operate, inexpensive, and presently being considered by a number of counties in the state of Florida.

## BELTS OF GOLD

If, however, you are more interested in new stuff than old stuff you can stop into the shop of Roger Dörig. He is the fourth generation in a family of craftsmen that produce engraved pieces of metal to be worn on leather belts. It's a handcraft that was originally associated with Alpine dairy herdsman and uses images that were part of the herdsman's life—there are cows, and there are cows, and, of course, some cows. Once in a while he throws in a cow herding dog or the farmhouse in which a cow herder lives. The cow and cow-related elements keep coming up because in Appenzell the cow is a symbol of wealth.

The more engraved pieces that a herdsman owned, the

## WHERE TO EAT IN EASTERN SWITZERLAND



### RESTAURANT RUHESITZ

1290 M  
FAM. H. MANSER  
CH-9058 BRÜLISAU  
TEL: +41 (0)71 799 11 67

### ROGGWILLER CAFE AND TEA ROOM

MULTERGASSE 17 UND BEIM BAHNHOF  
CH-9000 ST. GALLEN  
TEL: 071 222 50 92  
[WWW.ROGGWILLER.CH](http://WWW.ROGGWILLER.CH)

### ZUM GOLDENEN SCHÄFLI

METZGERGASSE 5  
CH-9000 ST. GALLEN  
TEL: 071 23 37 37

wealthier he appeared to his neighbors. Engraved belts are still very popular with the people of Appenzell and during the past few years tourists have joined the market. Roger also makes jewelry but his biggest seller with tourists are dog collars. It appears that the more engraved dog collars a person owns the wealthier that person appears to his neighbors and perhaps even more important to his neighbor's dog.

## THE DULCET TONES OF THE DULCIMERS

But the craft tradition in Appenzell is by no means limited to engraved cows and dog collars. Appenzell is also the home of Johannes Fuchs. Now on the surface he appears to be just a carpenter making furniture. But behind that dulcet exterior is a man who makes dulcimers and not just any dulcimers; he makes some of the finest dulcimers in the world. He learned the craft



## WHERE TO STAY IN EASTERN SWITZERLAND

### HOTEL EINSTEIN

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[WWW.EINSTEIN.CH](http://WWW.EINSTEIN.CH)



from his father who was a dulcimer maker but unfortunately not a dulcimer player so Johannes not only had to learn how to make them but also figure out how to tune them and play them.

In Persia, the playing of hammered dulcimers goes back at least two thousand years. During the 1500s, gypsies traveling from Eastern Europe to L.A., brought the dulcimer to Switzerland where it soon became a basic part of Swiss folk music.

Throughout the world, the shape of a dulcimer is pretty much the same—a trapezoid, which means it has four sides but only two of them are parallel. There are 125 strings. The long strings produce deep tones, the short strings produce high tones. And each edge on the hammer produces a different tone with each note.

### THE RESTAURANT RUHESITZ

They say that music soothes the savage beast but my experience is that food works much faster. So what's there to eat in Appenzell and where should we eat it? The mountains and the farmland that surround Appenzell contain the densest network of hiking trails in Switzerland and the local hangout for farmers and hikers is the restaurant Ruhesitz. It's located on the side of a mountain about twenty minutes from the center of town and has one of the great views to dine by.

The food is simple and traditional, perfect for hard working farmers and exhausted hikers. Meals usually start with a



plate of beef that has been marinated in sweet apple cider, air-dried and sliced into thin strips. This is often followed by a dish of pasta layered with Appenzell cheese and topped



with fried onions. There's a side dish of applesauce. Their signature dessert is an ice cream made from ginger bread cookies with a little bit of Appenzeller liquor on top.

The drink of choice is beer made by the Appenzell Brewery which makes an extensive line of beers and many are quite unusual. There's one made from chestnuts, one from oak, one from wheat and one from hemp. The hemp beer is particularly popular with people who lived in Northern California during the 60s.

Their most famous beer, however, is called full moon and for good reason. People who gather herbs believe if they are gathered on the night of a full moon they have a more intense flavor and the brewer believes the moon has the same effect on his beer. So every time there is a full moon he brews a batch.

### APPENZELL CHEESE

Appenzell is proud of its local beer but even more significant to the area's gastronomic importance is Appenzell's cheese. The Chäs Sutter cheese shop in Appenzell carries all the major cheeses of the area. The most famous of which is the cheese called Appenzell which is nice because it gives me one less thing to remember.

The curds have been cooked and pressed and the rind brushed. It ripens for about three months and ends up with a scattering of little air holes. There's a slight tang to the taste which comes from the newly formed cheese taking a bath in white wine or cider that has been seasoned with salt, pepper and herbs. You'll find Appenzell in good cheese shops throughout the world. It's used as a snack with fruit or crusty bread. It's also a cheese that can be used for making cheese fondue.



### GRAUBÜNDEN

After my tour of Appenzell, I took a Postbus to the canton of Graubünden which is also in eastern Switzerland. It's the largest canton in Switzerland with over 180,000 inhabitants. The area was originally settled by the Welch—same Welch that now populate Wales in the middle of England. In the year 15 BC, the ancient Romans marched into town, because they wanted to control the mountain passes between Italy and the rest of Europe.

Graubünden contains 14 passes so it was high on Rome's acquisition list. The passes were of great importance and a constant cause for battle, until the railroads came along, at

which point, everyone took a pass on the passes.

The people who live in Graubünden are known as Bundners. Their heritage goes back for thousands of years and they honor that heritage in many ways. First of all, in addition to speaking German, French, Italian and a little bit of English, there are people here who speak Romansch. Romansch is a language that got started when soldiers from ancient Rome who were guarding the passes took their Latin and combined it with the dialect of the people who were already living here. In addition, the people of Graubünden celebrate New Year's Day on March 1st, as the ancient Romans did.

Chur is the capital of Graubünden and its cathedral was built during its occupation by the ancient Romans. By 451 it had a bishop in residence. The present cathedral was put up in the middle of the 1100s. The portal dates from that time and so do the four columns that were designed to carry the bishop's pulpit. This was the cathedral of an important city on the ancient trade routes and it shows the influence of the cultures that passed through.

Hidden in a corner of the cathedral is a room that contains the cathedral's relics. Relics are things that belonged to saints or people who were on their way to becoming a saint or hoped to become saints. If a church had a good collection of relics, it attracted more visitors and more visitors meant more donations. Chur did well—it has a bone that belonged to Saint Placidus, 1480, a religious case for Saint Luzius, 1252, a Eucharist wafer case— 800 and glasses that held wine during the service—795 and 1250, plus shipping and handling.

## GLASS BLOWING GRAUBÜNDEN

The technique for shaping a mass of glass that has been softened by heat and blowing air into it through a tube goes back to the first century BC in ancient Syria. They formed things for everyday use as well as works of art and their glass was exported all over the Roman Empire.

Graubünden was part of the Roman Empire and the art of glass blowing has been practiced here for hundreds of years. For over a quarter of a century, Fred Mayer has been blowing glass in the city of Chur.

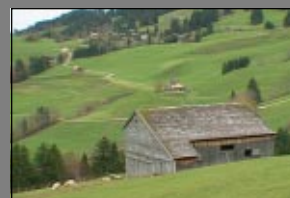
The technique is pretty much the same as it was over 2,000 years ago. The molten glass, which has the consistency of a thick molasses is held in a ball at the end of a hollow pipe. The glassblower blows into the pipe which inflates the molten glass.



The glass is shaped by blowing, rolling on a hard surface, pressing with tools, and cutting. Additions to the basic form, like handles and stems are made by welding.



Fred makes carafes shaped like apples with arrows going through it—a commemorative work honoring William Tell who shot an arrow through an apple that was sitting on his son's head. Fred also makes glass containers shaped like alp horns, brandy bottles with shapes inside that indicate the flavor of the brandy and tilted glasses which are used on the Glacier Express Trains. The slant on the glass has a very specific angle. It matches the slant of the dining tables on the train as it travels up and down the Swiss Alps. Interesting, the railroad doesn't have any slanted plates to keep your food from sliding around but all the wine is carefully protected.



## TO LEARN MORE . . .

### APPENZELLERLAND TOURISM

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