

Essentials

THE BEST OF LEISURE AND LIFESTYLE



Licence to Chill

On the tracks of James Bond and his five-star-lifestyle in the Swiss Alps, **Mike MacEacheran** finds that the exclusive resorts of Mürren and Arosa ensure that every visitor will leave shaken and stirred.

THE NAME'S CERTAINLY not Bond... James Bond. Ian Fleming's MI6 agent was far too suave for a man of my simple tastes. But looking out across 007's favourite view in the Jungfrau region of the Alps, the scene is one of inspiring snow-dusted peaks.

This area has provided some of the best movie set backdrops in 007 history. True, a dozen ski resorts across the world have appeared in the James Bond canon over the decades, but none are both as picturesque and prosperous as the ones on this metaphorical hit list.

Away from the glitz, glamour and

gold-plated toilet roll holders of St Moritz and Gstaad, exist two smaller and more refined mountain resorts, more in keeping with the James Bond legend. The movie stars may descend on St Moritz's infamous Badrutt's Palace by helicopter and the boutique managers in Gstaad may still line their pockets with orders for luxury fur coats, Armani dinner jackets and Cartier diamonds, but the Swiss have kept the best secrets for themselves. In particular this season, Mürren, in the Bernese Oberland, and Arosa, in Graubünden, are going the extra yard by offering a more understated form of luxury and that extra-special escape

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beyond last year's financial recession. In truth, it is a fantasy that is one part *Casino Royale* to two parts *For Your Eyes Only* – and, like Auric Goldfinger, the Swiss certainly know a thing or two about financial optimism.

Reached only by robotic gondola, Mürren is perched like the perfect villain's lair, inaccessible by road, boat or plane. Built as if it has literally been stitched into the side of the Schilthorn peak, Mürren survives in a world of its own. It is car-free, 1,650 metres above sea-level and has a well-heeled population of only 450. Despite the small number of people resident here, it offers more than 2,000 hotel beds. The village also played host to the cast

and crew of *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* in 1962.

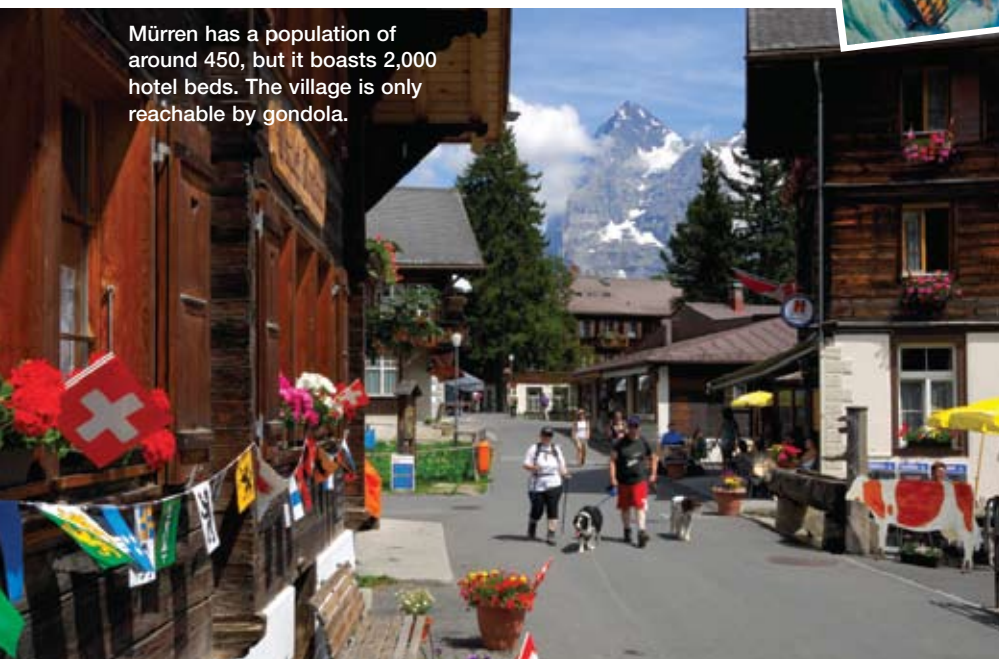
George Lazenby may have faded into memory as the worst James Bond in history but at least he was rewarded with the best 007 film set in the 22 film series. Like an old sepia film print, the initial sight of Mürren, with its chocolate box churches and chalets, will live much longer in the memory than poor old George ever will. Populated by the Swiss banking set's finest whilst on their annual spring breaks – Zurich and Bern are two hours and one hour away respectively, either by train or Aston Martin – Mürren offers an



Mürren, in the Bernese Oberland, has a view of the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau – the backdrop to many a movie.



Mürren has a population of around 450, but it boasts 2,000 hotel beds. The village is only reachable by gondola.





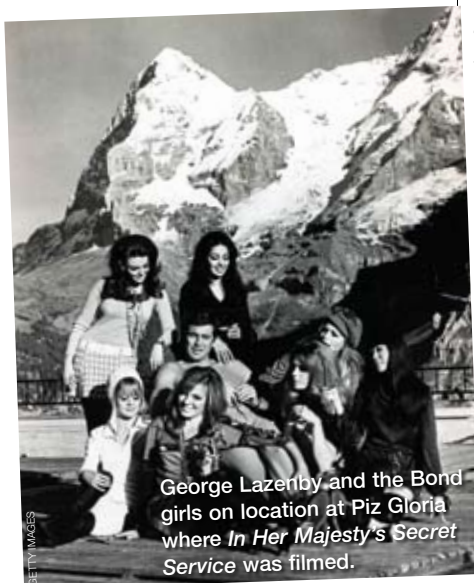
Arosa is easily reached by train from Mürren. The Rätische Bahn crosses the spectacular Langwieserviaduct that was finished in 1914.

unabashed slice of the good life from above the clouds. “Mürren stands out because of its breathtaking panoramic views,” explains René Feuz, tourism director for the village. “Tourism is our most important industry with about 90 to 95 per cent of financial dependency. Every year there are about 150,000 overnight stays – in summer there are 55,000 (36 per cent) and in winter 95,000 (64 per cent).”

OPTING OUT of the life or death thrill of skiing down the Schilthorn at break-neck speeds, I choose instead to recline on a



The revolving restaurant Piz Gloria was finished with money from the Bond production team in exchange for exclusive shooting rights.



George Lazenby and the Bond girls on location at Piz Gloria where *In Her Majesty's Secret Service* was filmed.

deck chair on the terrace at the revolving mountaintop restaurant Piz Gloria at 2,970 metres altitude and reached by the Schilthorn Aerial Cableway. Designed by the Bernese architect Konrad Wolf in the 1960s, the restaurant was financed and completed by the British production team in return for exclusive use for filming the sixth James Bond movie in the series. The Piz Gloria remains a marvel of engineering, with the entire upper floor rotating in approximately one hour, providing every guest with the perfect view.

“It was Ernst Feuz who developed the revolutionary idea of building the world’s first revolving restaurant at 3,000 metres altitude,” recalls René. “Of course, everyone thought he was mad, but he realised his dream – and that is where James Bond made his entrance.” Today, however, despite its nostalgic Hollywood charm, the ever efficient Swiss have gone one better in their pursuit of mountain magic: the world’s highest revolving eatery is now the 3,500-metre-high Metro-Alpin at the top of the Saas-Fee lift system in Valais.



The Panorama Restaurant in Allmendhubel offers stunning views from its 1,970-metre-high mountain perch.



The Tschuggen Express is a private gondola that takes guests to the exclusive Tschuggen Grand Hotel.

Now home to a 007 photography exhibition, the Piz Gloria showcases behind the scenes footage, original film stills from the 1960s production and a panoramic Touristorama theatre, so the setting is perhaps the best place in the Alps for a lunch of Stavro Blofeld entrecote from Argentina or James Bond 007 spaghetti. It's a great spot to enjoy more than 200 summits including the

UNESCO World Heritage listed peaks of Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau.

After enjoying Mürren you can take the Rhätische Bahn at Chur's main train station for the one hour mountain ascent to Arosa. Crossing the 60-metre-high Langwieser viaduct that stretches across the steep valley sides like an extra strong elastic band, we enter the high realm of Arosa, 1,775 metres above sea level.

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Nearby at Verzasca Dam, 100 kilometres to the south near Locarno, is the scene of the iconic 220-metre bungee jump that appears in the pre-credits opening sequence for *Goldeneye*.

Once the favoured holiday spot for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the author of Sherlock Holmes, Arosa is prime territory for deerstalker hats and Ian Fleming style adventures. Boasting the world's very first private ski lift – opened in December at a cost of a cool €5.4 million – and an Olympic silver medal winning Alpine spa (also the biggest for a mountain resort in

Europe), Arosa is undoubtedly the perfect place for a cinematic getaway.

The five-star Tschuggen Grand Hotel hosts a broad cast of businessmen and affluent bankers, as well as international visitors. Built into the side of the mountain the hotel boasts several boutique restaurants that are famous for their selection of Grison wines and truffle fondues. Across an enclosed elevated bridge there is also a 5,000-square-metre wellness oasis, a three-storey spa fitted out with saunas, a heated outdoor pool, solarium, natural cave and shark pools (minus the sharks of course).

“This is our pride and joy,” enthuses General Manager Leo Maissen, “It really is the ultimate in relaxation for guests, especially if they’ve been out in the mountains all day.” Designed by acclaimed architect Mario Botta, the roof, with its opulent filigree sails in glass and steel, is reminiscent of an opera house, yet blends harmoniously with the surrounding evergreens. Appropriately enough, Arosa hosts open air operas every summer and, later this year, Donizetti’s *Don Pasquale* – a masterpiece of 19th-century Italian opera – will be performed amid the mountain peaks. Could it really be any more fitting as a James Bond backdrop? ■

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Traditionally, alphorns were used to communicate over long distances in the Alps. Today, they're more of a tourist attraction.



The British Classic Car Meeting in St Moritz filled the streets with 007's Aston Martins, Bentleys and other unique vehicles.



Above and left: Bond would feel at home in the Tschuggen Grand Hotel, which is built into a mountain side. Besides luxurious suites it also offers the finest gastronomy.

