

Dear skiers,

Cold weather has arrived, and our trip to Switzerland is about two months away. I am starting to get excited. Here is some information to help you prepare for the trip.

- ✓ **Final payment due December 1.** Please refer to the enclosed invoice detailing the balance that you owe. Please mail your payment by December 1. It is not too late to sign up for trip insurance or for a half-board meal plan (see information below). Note: The non-group rate add-on is the extra charge we have to pay because our group is smaller than 20 people.
- ✓ **Pre-trip party.** I would like to plan a get-together on the Sunday evening before the trip (January 15), to distribute plane reservations and other trip information, and to give everyone a chance to get acquainted. Please keep that date free.
- ✓ **Passports.** I assume everyone knows that a passport is required for travel to Switzerland. If you do not have a passport, I strongly suggest applying for one today. If you do have a passport, I strongly suggest looking at it today to make sure it does not expire before February, 2006.
- ✓ **Travel Insurance** is available at a cost of \$81 per person. (This price is lower than the one on our flyer. Moguls Mountain Travel, our tour operator, has changed insurance companies, and has negotiated a lower price.) This insurance covers many types of emergencies, ranging from medical expenses to legal expenses, loss of baggage, trip delays, and cancellation due to emergencies. A description of the insurance is enclosed. Please read it carefully.
- ✓ **Money.** The unit of currency in Switzerland is the Swiss franc (CHF). At the current exchange rate, one dollar buys 1.31 Swiss francs (if you are a bank buying from another bank). A major credit card provides the best exchange rate available, and I recommend using a credit card for purchases as much as possible. The second-best conversion rate is through ATMs. Most European ATMs are part of the Cirrus or PLUS network, which accept most American ATM cards. Swiss ATMs dispense Swiss francs, and the equivalent dollar amount is deducted from your bank account. There is a small service charge (typically \$1.50), but you will still get a better rate than you will through AAA, traveler's checks, banks, or airport currency exchange kiosks.
- ✓ **Meals.** A complimentary "lavish buffet breakfast" is provided daily by the hotel. Lunch is on your own. The optional halfboard meal plan offers a daily dinner in the hotel at a cost of \$130 for the week for the three-course plan or \$170 for the four-course plan. The four-course plan includes both soup and salad, where the three-course plan includes only one. The menu varies daily. An example of a meal: Soup of the Day, Mixed Salad, Pork Chop, Duchess Potatoes, Dessert. Doesn't say much about how it is prepared, but I am told they do a nice job. The hotel specialty is a fondue dinner with 10 sauces, which is available for an extra charge. I think we should plan to do that one of the days. Currently six people are enrolled in the meal plan.
- ✓ **Restaurants.** For those who choose not to enroll in the halfboard plan, there are many restaurants in Interlaken. Reviewing the restaurants listed on the Interlaken web site, I found that many of the restaurants, particularly the ones that are not pizza parlors or Chinese takeout, are in other hotels. Examples of prices, in

restaurants with online menus in English or close enough to decipher: Trout dinner CHF 32.50; Prime rib dinner CHF 59.00; Fried shrimp CHF 17.50; Sweet & sour chicken CHF 26.00, fixed-price dinners CHF 19.50-48.00. In European restaurants, a gratuity is generally included in the tab, although an extra tip can be added for exceptional service. When paying, it is customary to round up to the next franc.

- ✓ **Flights.** We are flying on United Airlines. United recommends arriving at least two hours before the departure time when traveling internationally.

Flight	From	To	Departs	Arrives
UA7163	Cleveland	Washington DC (Dulles)	2:40 p.m. January 20 (Friday)	4:01 p.m.
UA 936	Washington	Zurich	5:55 p.m. January 20	7:50 a.m. January 21 (Saturday)
UA 937	Zurich	Washington	11:35 a.m. January 28 (Saturday)	3:10 p.m.
UA 7135	Washington	Cleveland	4:55 p.m. January 28 (Saturday)	6:32 p.m.

- ✓ **Baggage.** The airline industry standard for baggage allows two checked bags. Your ski bag and boot bag combined count as one of those bags, provided that only skis and boots are packed in the bags. No bag (or combination of ski and boot bag) may weigh more than 50 lb., or have total dimensions adding up to more than 62 inches (length + width + height). People often get away with breaking the rules, but you do so at your own risk. There is an \$80 charge for bags that are too large or too heavy. For carry-on, you are allowed one carry-on bag and one personal item (purse, computer, briefcase, camera, etc.) No carry-on item can exceed 9 × 14 × 22 inches.
- ✓ **Ground Transportation.** A charter bus will take us from the Zurich airport to Interlaken and back. Bus cost and driver tip are included in the trip price. To get to the ski resorts, a shuttle bus departs from in front of the hotel daily at 8:30 a.m. for Grindelwald resort, and returns in the afternoon. You can ski to the other resorts from there. The shuttle is free for holders of lift tickets. The resorts are also accessible by train, which departs every half hour from the train station, about a five-minute walk from the hotel. A train pass is included with purchase of two or more days' lift tickets, otherwise the fare is CHF 7,60.
- ✓ **Lift tickets.** Lift tickets can be purchased from a tourist center about a five-minute walk from the hotel. It appears that a five-day lift ticket costs a little less than \$200. There may be senior discounts and/or a group rate. I am still working on getting specifics.
- ✓ **Ski resorts.** We will have access to three ski resorts in the Jungfrau region: Grindelwald, Murren, and Wengen. Elevations are Grindelwald: 3,414 ft. base, 8,260 ft. peak. Murren: 5,449 ft. base, 9,808 ft. peak. Wengen: 4,207 ft. base,

- 8,164 ft. peak. Complaints I have heard about European ski resorts are that trails are poorly marked and ungroomed, and that the people are rude and pushy. I have been assured that the three resorts near Interlaken have well-marked trails and groom them daily. Not much can be done about the people (although well-marked queues would help).
- ✓ **Hotel.** We will be staying at the Hotel Swiss Chalet in Interlaken. It is a fairly modern hotel, about a 10-minute walk from the center of town. Rooms have twin beds that can be pushed together to make a large bed. The hotel's web site is http://www.chalet-swiss.ch/e_default.asp, where you can see pictures of the hotel and rooms. What you will not find on the web site is that the hotel is part of the Comfort Inn chain. According to the Comfort Inn description,
 - The hotel was built in a Swiss Chalet style and is only 5 to 10 walking minutes from Interlaken Railway Station West, the city center and boat landing stage.
 - Set in tranquil surroundings, visitors will enjoy beautiful views of the Eiger, Munch and Jungfrau.
 - The hotel's owner personally ensures it is run with a friendly staff to make sure every stay is enjoyable.
 - All guest rooms feature bath, shower, WC, self-dialing telephones, cable television and radio. A lavish buffet breakfast is included in the room rate. Guests will enjoy the hot tub and sauna. The hotel also offers free bicycle rentals for local rides.
 - ✓ **Electricity.** Like most of Europe, Switzerland uses 220-volt, 50-cycle power. This will fry your 110-volt American appliances unless you use a voltage converter. You will also need a round plug adapter to fit in the European outlet. **Note that plug adapters alone do not convert voltage.** I have verified that the hotel provides a hair dryer in each room, and I recommend leaving your hair dryer at home rather than trying to use it with a convertor. Many converters do not work well with hair dryers because of the ground fault protector (that little box on the plug of your hair dryer).
 - ✓ **Interlaken.** Interlaken is a favorite European tourist town set between two lakes and surrounded by mountains. Attractions include a casino, plenty of shopping and dining opportunities, sightseeing, and a variety of mountain excursions. Several other Swiss cities, including Bern (the capitol), are convenient day trips by train. The mean temperature in Interlaken in January is 32 degrees F, with high temperatures averaging 36 degrees and low temperatures averaging 26 degrees. The city is at an altitude of 1,871 ft. The city's official tourism web site is <http://www.interlakentourism.ch>. (Click on the small British flag in the upper left corner of the page for an English version.)

If you have any additional questions, feel free to contact me at (216) 371-3981 or cfl@gwis.com.

Think Snow!

Cliff Lewis