

SHERPA: SWITZERLAND: THE WILDSTRUBEL CIRCUIT

8-day / 7-night self-guided walking holidays (JWS - Revised: October 09)

This is a one-week hotel trek, which starts and finishes at Kandersteg. It follows a circular route around the Wildstrubel using trails that have served since Roman times to link the German-speaking Bernese Oberland and the partly French-speaking Valais.

Before the rail tunnels were bored through the mountainsides and threaded through the adjacent valleys; these mountains formed a natural barrier, and Kandersteg was a hamlet literally at the end of the road. Surprisingly a lot of the trade over the high passes before rail, was done in winter with heavy oxen-pulled sledges. There wasn't much work to be done on the land at that time of year and the sledges could move quite rapidly. On the other hand it was a very risky business and many were caught out on high passes in blizzards.

Most notoriously there is the Gemmi Pass, which has been a principal route through the Alps for centuries. We will also cross the Rawyl, Lotschen and Hahnenmoos passes to link the attractive villages of Leukerbad, Crans, Lenk and Adelboden before completing the circuit in Kandersteg. Our final pass, The Bundeschrinde, due to its beauty and position is perhaps the highlight of the walk. The towering crags above the pass are a superb point for watching Chamoix – mountain antelope – prancing around upon the ledges. You have an extra day in Kandersteg in which you can do a circular walk up to the Oeschinensee: a fantastic postglacial lake.

Throughout the tour the scenery is expansive, with views extending across the Oberland, to the 4000m peaks of the Valais, and down the Rhone valley. There are some long days but lifts and cable cars can sometimes be used to shorten some of the walks (not included in the tour price).

Travel information:

Season: Mid July to Late September, start any day (i.e. finish tour by late September). Note that new snowfall can occasionally occur on the higher passes at any time.

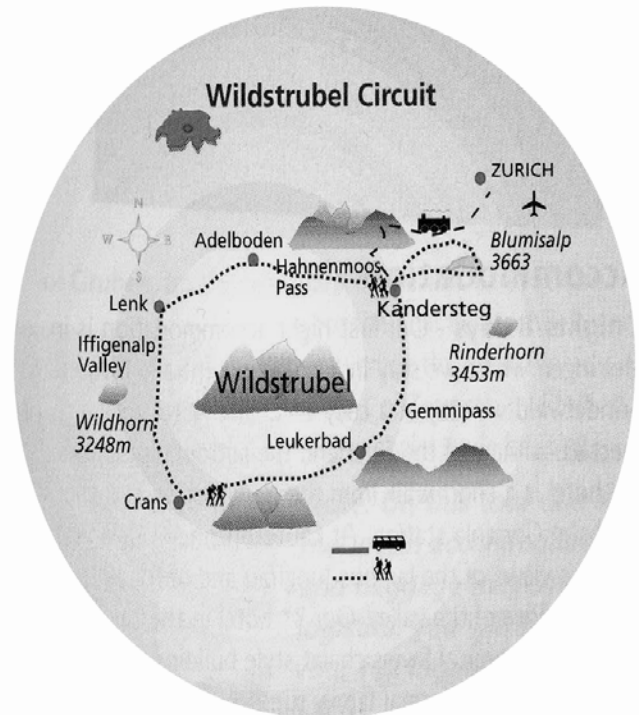
Arrival: Hourly train service from Zurich airport (2hrs 40mins) and Geneva airport (about 3 hours 30mins), usually involving a change of trains in Bern.

First Hotel: Kandersteg. The first hotel has offered to collect luggage and clients and their baggage from Kandersteg train station on arrival (you should phone from the airport to tell the hotel which train they will be arriving on).

Nearest airports: Zurich or Geneva

End of Tour: The tour ends on day 8 at Kandersteg.

Grade: Moderate to challenging. For fit walkers who can manage longish days with more than 1000m ascent in a day. All the walks are on established waymarked trails, which can be rocky or steep at times. Walkers should also have a reasonable head for heights as some trails are on cliffs sides. The longest day can be shortened (recommended).



Contact Outdoor Travel for more itinerary details and reservations



Waymarking: The route is well waymarked. It is necessary to carry and be able to use a compass / map in case of mist. We also recommend that you call the local tourist office for the weather forecast locally. In case of bad weather or snow conditions making walking inadvisable we provide descriptions on how to reach the night's destination using public transport. We provide relevant train and bus timetables. The cost of such transfers is not included in the tour price, but there is a 50% discount if you possess a Swiss Card. These are obtainable from the Swiss Centre in London or can be bought at Zurich or Geneva train station's travel centres.

Baggage Transfers: This used to be a tour completely covered by baggage transfers, unfortunately some things have got worse in Switzerland over the years and one of those is the transfer of baggage. This used to be based on the national rail and post bus operator, but since the system was privatized bags into some of the further flung mountain destinations take more than a day to travel to their destinations. So on this trip your baggage is not transported to the hotels for nights 2 & 3, so you will need to bring with you a backpack large enough to carry an extra set of clothing and footwear as well as wash kit for 3 days: (2, 3 & 4). On day 5, although this is the shortest walking day, the bags can arrive late at Adelboden, so again it is worth taking with you a change of clothes etc.

What's Included: The price is based on two people sharing a twin or double room and includes bed & breakfast accommodation on 7 evenings, plus 4 evening meals. Evening meals are at your own expense in Leukerbad on day 2 and in Kandersteg on days 6 and 7. Also included is the transfer of baggage on days 4, 5 and 6 to the next hotel. Please note that Sherpa pays for one piece of luggage per person to be moved (allow approx. CHF 20 per extra bag per move). Any local trains, buses or cable car services that you may use are not included.

General Information

Baths: it is not normal for your room to have a bath, the main reason being that it takes up a lot of space, some hotels may have a separate room where a bath is available to guests, but in the main expect showers.

Breakfast: in countries such as Switzerland this is usually buffet style, please don't offend your hosts by making up a picnic lunch from the breakfast buffet unless it has been specifically organised for you. It is important for you to tell us if you have any dietary requirements when you book your holiday so that we can inform everyone that you are staying with.

Single Supplements: are payable on most of our tours. The single supplement guarantees the privacy of your own room, however, rooms can at times be small and in some places may not enjoy the same facilities as double/twin rooms.

Luggage: When your bags are delivered to the hotel, sometimes they will have been taken to your room awaiting your arrival. However don't be surprised if your luggage is waiting for you to take it up to your room.

Suggested itinerary:

Day 1: Arrive in Kandersteg. There is an hourly train service from Zurich airport and Geneva airport, changing trains in most cases in Bern. Journey time from Zurich is 2 hours 40 mins. The hotel in Kandersteg will send a car to the station to collect you and your luggage if you telephone them.

Day 2: Kandersteg to Leukerbad 14km / 6hrs 40mins. The walk takes you steeply up to Gemmipass (2314m). The route over the Gemmipass can be considerably shortened by taking the cable car up from Eggeschwand to Sunnbuel (1920m). You then hike out over the alpine meadows of the Spittelmatte under and impressive peak called Altels, and then up the valley and around the 'Daubensee' postglacial lake and then up to its busy 'lip' - the Gemmipass! You are now passing from the Bernese Oberland into the Swiss Valais. The steep

though well engineered path down from pass to the spa (hot spring centre) of Leukerbad (1411m) can also be avoided by use of a cable car, but perhaps this just makes the walk too easy!

Day 3: Leukerbad to Crans-Montana 23km / 7hrs 40mins. Can be shortened to about 6 hours by catching a bus for the final stretch to the ski and golf resort of Crans-Montana (1500m). A beautiful walk through alpine pastures and woodlands with fine views across the Rhone valley and the Valais Alps, including the Weisshorn and the Grand Combin.

Day 4: Crans-Montana to Lenk 28km / 10hrs. It is recommended that you reduced the walk to 18.5km / 7.5hrs by catching the post bus from Iffigenalp to Lenk. This is a long hard day, but in reasonable weather it is a beautiful walk. The first part of the walk there is the option to walk along the 'Bisse du Rou' a high-level irrigation canal with a narrow walkway. The views are fantastic. The trail passes the Tzeusier dam and climbs over the Rawyl Pass (2429m) under the Mittaghorn (2685m), which is the highpoint of the whole week's trek. Next you make the long steep descent down to Iffigenalp to catch the post bus to Lenk. Otherwise, if you are intent on walking you drop down through the idyllic Iffigen valley to the small spa town of Lenk (1086m). The sulfurous waters here attract people from all over.

Day 5: Lenk to Adelboden 12km / 4hrs 45mins. This is a nice walk up to the grassy Hahenmoospass, which has some amazing colourful wild meadows in June / July. The pass is a popular place for flying model aircraft, perhaps due to the potentially soft landings offered by the surroundings! You will also be able to see the summit of the Wildstrubel today if it is clear (you may have been wondering where it was!). From the pass it is a casual descent down to Adelboden which is a smart Swiss town, which prides itself on its shops and its tennis competitions: there are also some of the best overall views of the Wildstrubel from the restaurant. This day can also be shortened by using the bus service from Lenk up to Buelberg (1661m), from where you ascend to the Hahnenmoospass (1956m). It is an easy descent with cable car options to Adelboden (1356m)

Day 6: Adelboden to Kandersteg 16km / 7hrs. A long ascent, with beautiful views, to the Bundeschride pass (2380m). This is perhaps the most dramatic of the passes that you go over on this route. This is followed by a steep descent to Kandersteg with fine views of the Blumlisalp massif and the Oeschinensee Lake. This is a particularly fine pass - a breach through rocky strata - a bit like a mini Breche de Roland (in the Pyrenees) but there is nothing mini about the views: it is a spectacular location and if you are quiet you might see Chamoix or even Ibex on the crags along here!

Day 7: In Kandersteg. Today could be used as a complete rest day, but there are some great 'there and back' walks you could do including up and around the Oeschinensee Lake. This is a fantastic egg shaped postglacial lake with a blocked exit under the Blumisalp and the Doldenhorn group of mountains. There are lower and upper trails around parts of the lakes, offering varied panoramas. On the other hand, you could take a little paddleboat out onto the water, ice cream in hand!

Day 8. Depart from Kandersteg. There is an hourly train service to Zurich/Geneva airports changing en route in Bern.

Accommodation & Meals: Accommodation is booked on a bed & breakfast basis with 4 evening meals also included. These are on night 1 in Kandersteg, night 3 in Crans Montana, night 4 in Lenk and night 5 in Adelboden. Where meals are not included there is a good choice of restaurants for evening meals. All hotels are of 3-star standard. Lunches are not included in the tour cost, however picnic materials can be purchased on weekdays in each of the towns and villages we stay at, packed lunches can also be purchased from the hotels if requested the evening before. On some days you will pass mountain huts on the route, which offer hearty snacks and drinks, (details in route notes).

Nights 1, 6 & 7: Kandersteg. A 3-star hotel centrally located with convenient access to the hiking trails, cable cars and lifts, shops and the railway station (5 minutes on foot). All rooms have a balcony, bath/shower, WC, hair-dryer, cable TV, radio and direct-dial telephone. First night half board, other nights bed & breakfast. Evening meal on nights 6 & 7 can be obtained either at the hotel or elsewhere in the village.

Night 2: Leukerbad / Loeche-les-Bains. A simple 3-star chalet style hotel in this pleasant small spa town. TV in all rooms. Terrace restaurant.

Night 3: Crans-Montana. Our 3-star hotel is a centrally situated modern building in this purpose built mountain resort. It sits on the edge of Lac Grenon, with views across to the mountains on the other side of the Rhone valley. The hotel serves an excellent set menu and has a microbrewery attached.

Night 4: Lenk Here we stay in a 3-star hotel right in the town centre and many rooms have their own balcony. The hotel has a sun terrace with alpine views. There is a small pool and sauna open to guests. Dinner is a well-prepared standard tavern type faire. There is also a nearby sulphur spa and public swimming pool.

Night 5: Adelboden. A friendly welcome awaits you at this chalet style 'Sports hotel' (3 star). Pine furniture is much in evidence. A superb dinner is served in the panoramic restaurant – often up to 5 courses! There is a large buffet style breakfast including Swiss cheeses. The guests can use the sauna, Turkish steam room and open-air pool –a great thing just before dinner!

Swiss Cards: These optional cards include 'free' travel from the airport of arrival to your 1st hotel and from the last hotel back to the airport. In between you enjoy half price travel on trains, post buses, lake steamers and many cable cars as well. They are not likely to save you money on this tour unless you intend to travel on a lot of the cable car options or if you are staying longer and have other travel plans within Switzerland. The Swiss Transfer Card is similar but simply includes journeys from the airport to your first night's stop and from your last night's stop back to the airport. Consult your nearest Swiss tourist office for full details.

On Self-Guided Tours we provide you with route notes and maps.

Other walking holidays – guided in small groups or self-guided with inn-to-inn luggage transfers & meals are available in many parts of Europe through **Outdoor Travel** including in Switzerland the Mont Blanc Circuit, the Alpine Pass Route, the Haute Route, Bernese Oberland & at meiringen.

For long distance routes we offer the the Way of St James from Le Puy to Santiago, the route of Pilgrims along the River Yonne to Vezeley in Burgundy and St Cuthbert's Way from Scotland into England. We also offer literary walking routes or trails in the footsteps of famous painters such as van Gogh in Provence.

Contact Outdoor Travel for more itinerary details and reservations

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