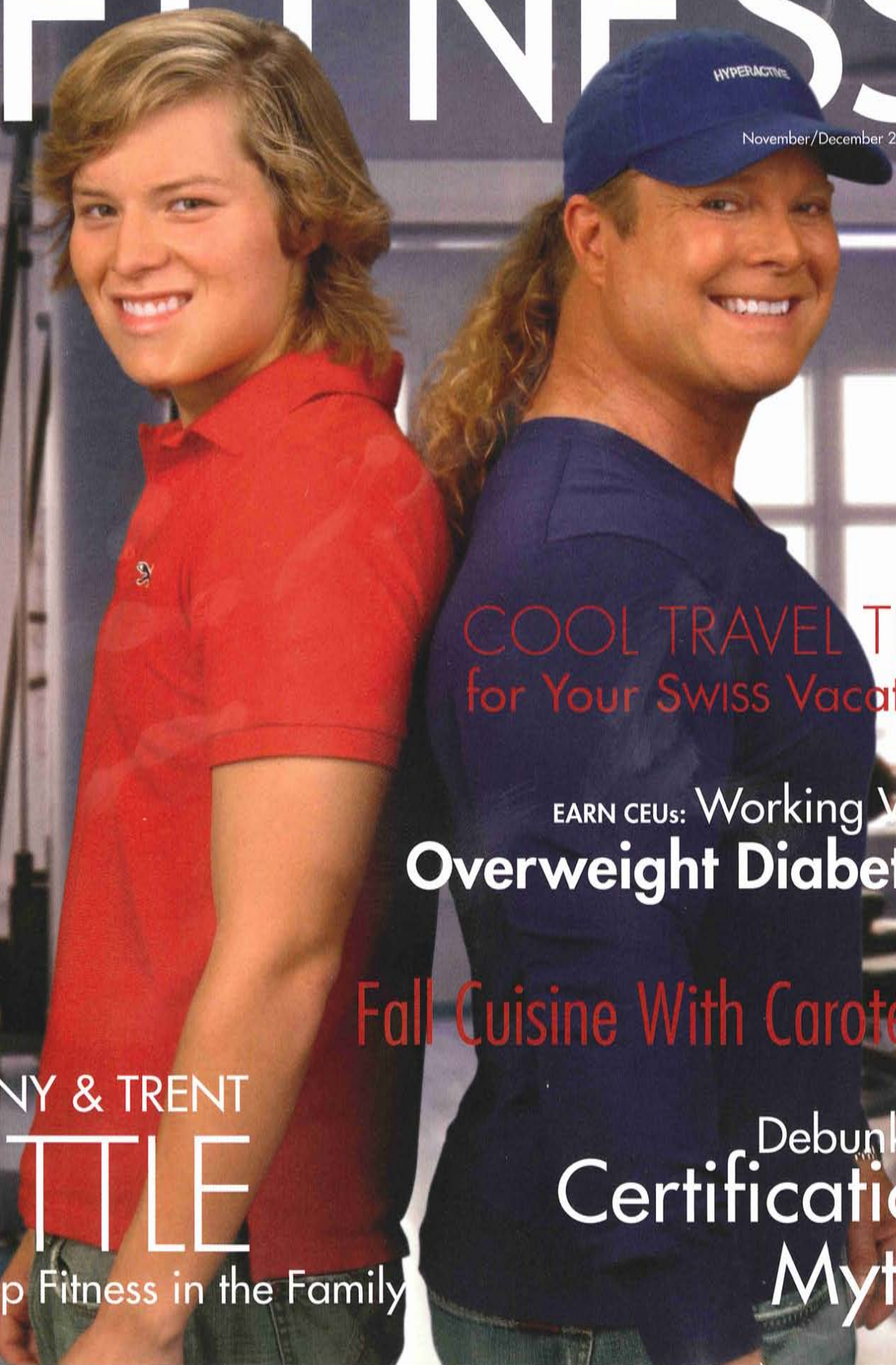


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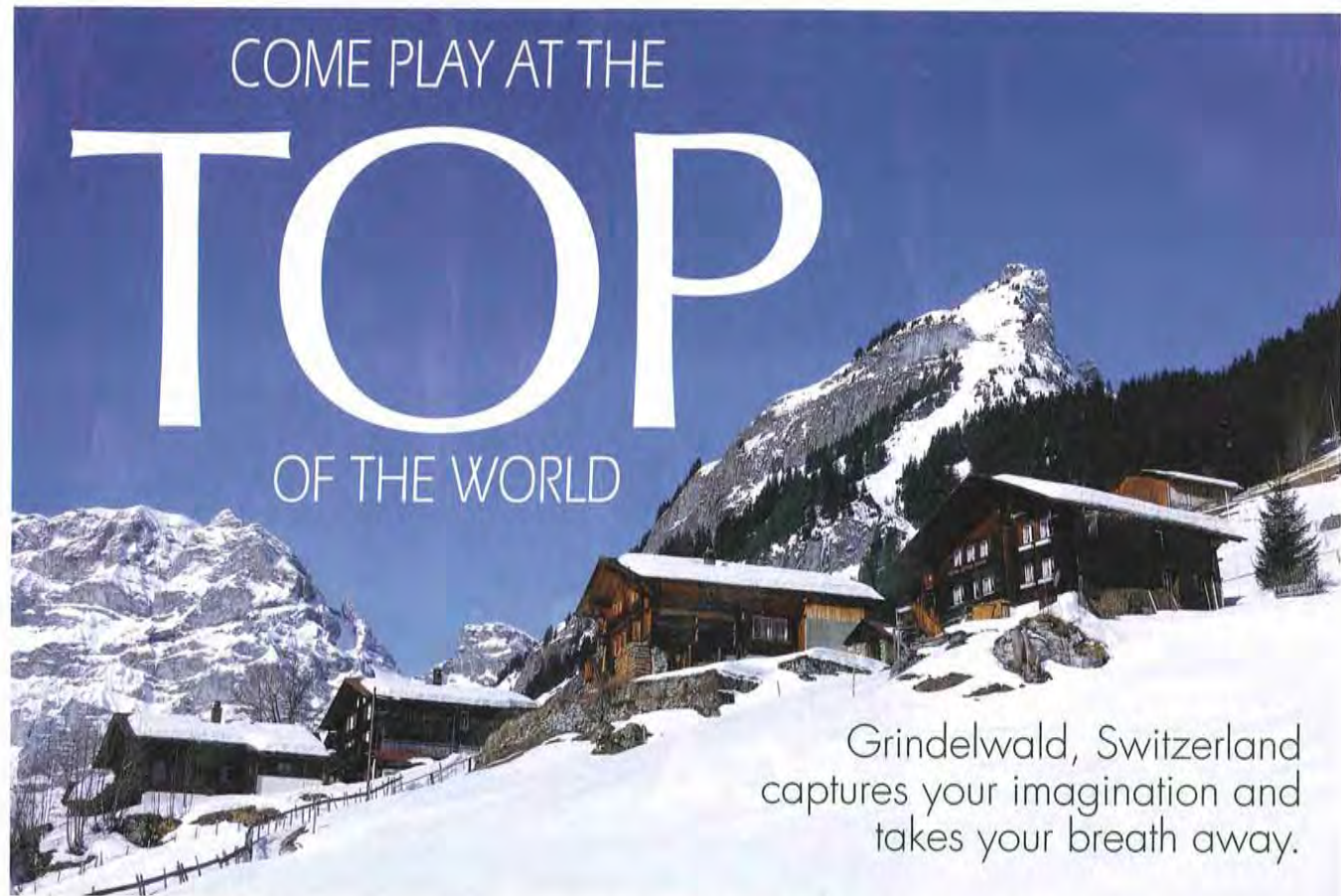
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Grindelwald, Switzerland captures your imagination and takes your breath away.

STORY BY JERRY SOVERINSKY • PHOTOS BY WENGEN-LAUTERBRUNNEN TOURISM

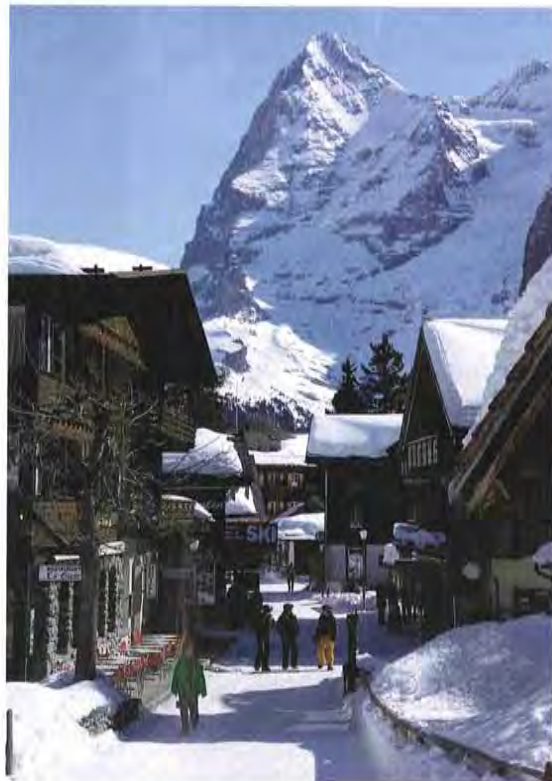
Even for locals, the approach to Grindelwald, in Switzerland's Bernese Oberland region, is dramatic and unforgettable. The centuries-old Berner Oberland Bahn (BOB) creeps steadily along the narrow-gauge railway from Interlaken, giving you commanding views of the rushing Lütschine River marking the path for much of the 30-minute journey. Just past Zweilütschinen, the views open, and before you, the towering Wetterhorn (12,142 feet) and Schreckhorn (13,379 feet), announce your arrival into the Alpine region. If those two mountains were all that defined Grindelwald, you would have already spent your holiday in admirable company. But as your train pulls into the Grindelwald main station, you disembark and turn to your right, standing awestruck before the world's most impressive and awesome trio of mountain peaks: Eiger (13,025 feet), Mönch (13,448 feet), and Jungfrau (13,642 feet).

Welcome to Grindelwald.

AN ANCIENT TRAVEL DESTINATION

With a history that dates back at least 850 years, it wasn't until the early 19th century when its first hotel was built that Grindelwald's modern-day tourism seeds were planted. Over the next century, with the development of transport facilities—the BOB in 1888 and Jungfrauoch station (the highest rail station in Europe) in 1912—tourism began to flourish, stretching internationally. Winston Churchill documented his 1894 ascent up the Wetterhorn, which prompted an influx of English-speaking visitors. A century later, it is one of the world's premier destinations for mountain adventurers.

Grindelwald is a member of the Jungfrau tourist region, an area that





includes Interlaken, Wengen, Mürren, and Lauterbrunnen. Grindelwald is not nearly as busy as Interlaken (4,000 inhabitants compared to 14,000), but has considerably more facilities than Wengen, Mürren and Lauterbrunnen.

PLAYTIME IN WONDERLAND

Skiers will find the Jungfrau region especially accommodating. With 120 miles of runs spread evenly among all skill levels, the mountain is a never-ending source of downhill pleasure. Although you can ski in Vail or Steamboat (albeit with lift tickets 25 to 35 percent more expensive than those in Grindelwald), what brings me back to Grindelwald winter after winter is the hiking and sledding.

Grindelwald and the Jungfrau region cover more than 50 miles of groomed winter walking paths. This is not deep snow trekking—each morning Zamboni-like machines tamp snow along carefully marked trails, ensuring unencumbered routes for hikers. Reaching into the highest alpine peaks that stretch far beyond the ski runs, these routes afford travelers coveted, dramatic views of snow-capped mountain vistas.

Walkers and hikers can take

advantage of the same extensive network of chairlifts, gondolas and cable cars that skiers use (at a considerable discount), eliminating the steep ascents and descents that might otherwise deter a less experienced traveler. For instance, one of the most popular walks between Grindelwald and the Lauterbrunnen Valley runs from Männlichen to the Kleine Scheidegg. This is an extraordinarily scenic route, with uninterrupted views of the Eiger's massive North Face. One could begin in Grindelwald, tackling the ascent to Männlichen, a 4,265-foot altitude gain, in roughly four to five hours. By the time you reach it, you might be too tired to enjoy the 90-minute walk to Kleine Scheidegg. Instead, why not enjoy a leisurely and scenic chairlift ride from Grindelwald to Männlichen, arriving at the station well rested.

DOWNHILL IN STYLE

Descents are just as easily managed, though I recommend another downhill option—sledding (or "sledging," as the locals call it). Grab a sled or toboggan—rentals are available in all Jungfrau region villages—and descend from the peaks of most hiking trails along well-marked and groomed paths. The run

from Kleine Scheidegg down to Grindelwald is roughly 4 miles in length, and the entire trail is in the shadow of the mighty Eiger.

My personal favorite daylong excursion, which admittedly is a bit long for many travelers, begins in Grindelwald (3,280 feet) and heads up to the Faulhorn (8,858 feet), a six-hour ascent that's more about fitness than views. However, once you reach the First Station (roughly 2/3 of the way to Faulhorn), the remainder of the ascent is absolutely magnificent with broad, alpine vistas. Less ambitious walkers can take a chairlift to First Station, making the Faulhorn ascent in less than two hours. At the top of the Faulhorn, you'll find a rustic mountain restaurant, the perfect respite for resting your weary legs, where you can snack on sandwiches and soup, and warm yourself with coffee and hot chocolate. On clear days, hundreds of mountain peaks surround you in a 360-degree panorama of high-altitude nirvana.

When your muscles have recovered and you're ready for the descent back to Grindelwald, you can enjoy a thrilling 8-mile sled run. And for the speed

challenged, don't worry, this isn't a slippery luge run but a gentle descent ideal for sledders of all constitutions.

ENJOY THE EVENING TO THE END

The fun doesn't stop when the sun goes down. Evening sledders will love the Bussalp Fondue-Sled run, a perfect way to spend a star-filled winter night. For less than \$50 (U.S.), guests enjoy a one-way bus transfer from Grindelwald to the Bussalp, where they have a festive fondue dinner. After the buses depart for Grindelwald, guests then hop on their sleds or toboggans, for a 4.5-mile thrilling descent to Grindelwald—it's an unlit trail, though the moon and stars shed sufficient light for most. There's also an evening bar perfect for a mid-descent cocktail.

Speeding under the brilliant night sky is the perfect way to end a trip to one of the world's true winter wonderlands. **AF**

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Jerry Soverinsky is a Chicago-based freelance writer and author whose work has appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*, *Boston Herald*, *The Globe and Mail*, American Media publications, and National Lampoon among others. He previously owned an adventure travel company, where he hosted travelers on European bicycling, hiking, mountain biking, culinary and specialty tours. For more information, visit www.jerrysoverinskycreative.com.

GETTING TO GRINDELWALD

- By car: Grindelwald is motor-vehicle-friendly with easy access from Zurich, Bern and Geneva. Follow signs to Interlaken, after which, Grindelwald is less than 12 miles away.
- By rail: From Interlaken Ost station, direct connections can be made in 35 minutes.
- By Air: Passengers from Zurich or Geneva airports can make fast connections to Interlaken via rail. From there, Grindelwald is 35 minutes away.
- Discounts for seniors, children and teenagers.
- Passes can be purchased online at www.jungfrauwinter.ch or at the Grindelwald station.

Hiking/Sledding Passes

- From 35 to 49 Swiss francs (about \$28 to \$39 U.S. dollars)/day.
- Discounts for children.
- Passes can be purchased online at www.jungfrauwinter.ch or at the Grindelwald station.

Ski School

Contact Grindelwald Sports: 033.854.1280; info@grindelwald-sports.ch

Lodging

Every standard of hotel luxury is represented, plus apartment rentals, mountain huts, hostels, camping and farm stays. Contact the tourist information center for reservation assistance.

Time Zone

Six hours ahead of EST. Daylight savings time from the end of March through October.

Tourist Information (All major languages spoken)

- Grindelwald Tourism, Postfach 124, 3818 Grindelwald
- Open daily, 8 a.m. to noon, 1:30 p.m. to 6 p.m. (office opens at 9 a.m. on Sundays)
- Phone: 033.854.1212
- Fax: 033.854.1210
- E-mail: touristcenter@grindelwald.ch
- Web: www.grindelwald.com
- General Switzerland tourist information can be found at www.usa.myswitzerland.com

Ski Passes

- From 45 to 60 Swiss francs (about \$36 to \$48 U.S. dollars)/day.

VELOGEMEL: THE BIKE SLED

Have you mastered the sled or toboggan and are looking for a greater downhill challenge? Why not rent a velogemel, a wooden bike sled invented and patented by a Grindelwald native almost a century ago. Also known as a ski bob or snow bike, it sits a couple of feet higher than a sled. With no brakes—you drag your feet to stop and turn—it's an exhilarating and slightly frightening way to experience the slopes.

