



Switzerland for Dummies: General Hints (Part 6 of 6)

by [Lee Lau](#)
Jan 22, 2012



|| [Flims-Laax](#) || [Lenzerheide](#) || [Davos-Klosters](#) || [Engadin-St. Moritz](#) || [Zermatt](#) || [General tips and tricks](#) ||

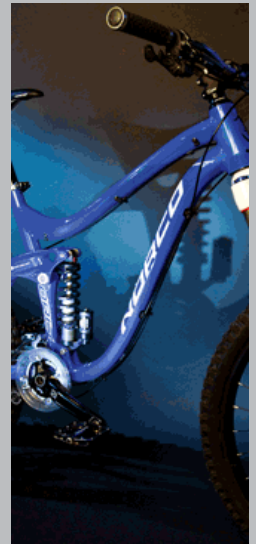
General Info:

- [Travel Wiki Page](#)
- [Tourism Switzerland](#)
- [Swiss Alpine Adventure](#)
- [Swiss Maps](#)
- [Bike-explorer maps](#)
- [SBB](#)
- [Graubunden Tourism](#)
- [Flims/Laax](#)
- [Davos Klosters](#)
- [Engadin St Moritz](#)
- [Livigno](#) (we'll be back to do a proper story on them next year)
- [Zermatt](#)



The omnipresent chue (cows) and the RhatischeBahn (Rhaetian Railway) on the very touristy but very beautiful descent from Bernina Pass to Pontresina

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Video courtesy of Tom Malecha

Getting Here:

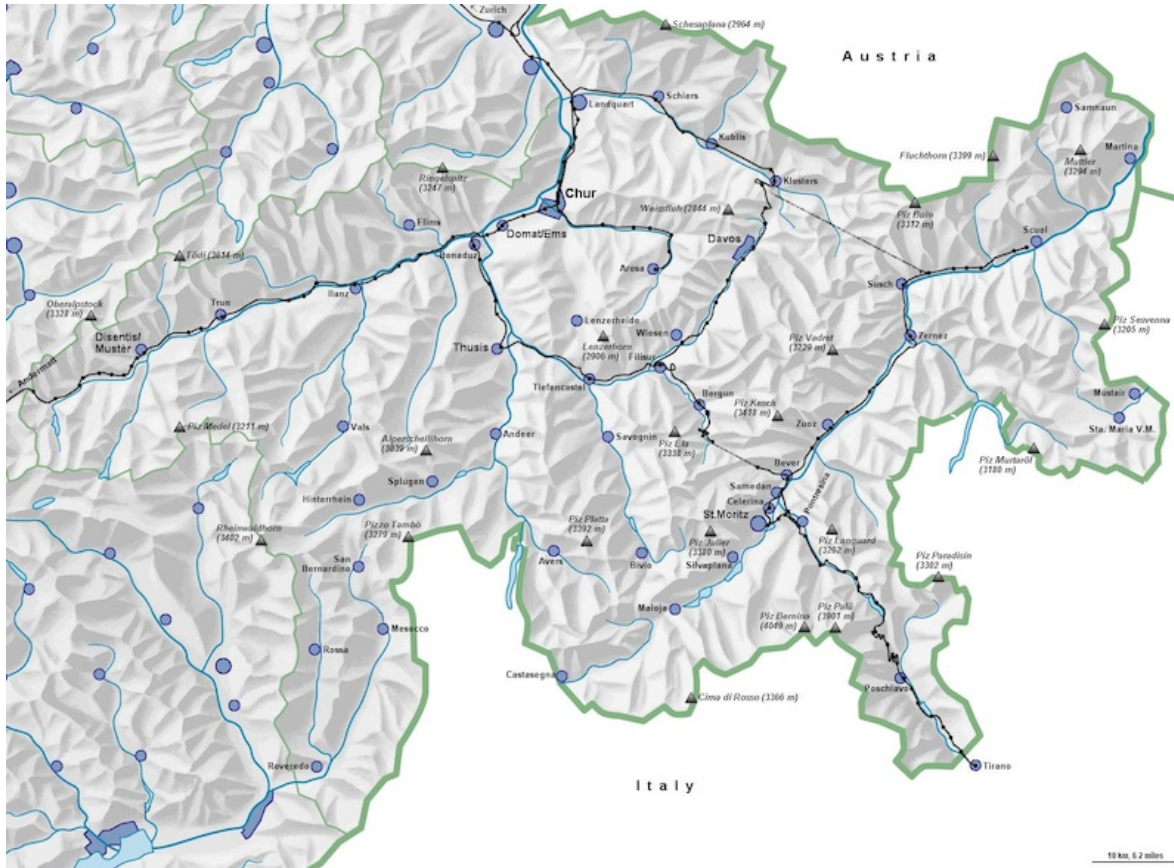
- Getting to Zurich from Vancouver is relatively painless. We flew via Air Berlin for about Can \$1050 per person.
- The airport does have a “[Left Luggage](#)” office where you can store baggage for extended periods but we didn’t want to get to the airport at 5:00am to pack our bikes and catch the plane. We had a 7:45am flight home in three weeks and didn’t want to carry bike bags around everywhere we went (we packed our bikes using the [Mitch Chubey hockey bag method](#)). We opted to book a hotel room near the airport where we could store our bike bags while we were here. We stayed at the [Fly Away Hotel](#) which, like most hotels near the airport, had a shuttle just outside the terminal right to the hotel. There was no charge for storing the bike bags. That service was provided along with the one night hotel room booking
- It turned out that SBB (the Swiss rail system) is so efficient that, if we had managed to book an afternoon or evening flight we could easily have skipped staying at the airport hotel and could have packed the bikes into travel bags and squeezed in one more day of riding.
- We used the [Android SBB app](#) to plan our bus trips between locations. There are apps for iPhone, Symbian and Java based phones too but its data-based so watch for roaming charges



Taking the efficient PostBus back to Lenzerheide to Chur after riding down to Chur

Travel to Graubünden:

- From the Fly Away Hotel we caught an Inter City bus from the Klotten station to the Zurich HB (central train station) where you catch the train to Chur. We activated our [Swiss Pass](#). This pass must be bought outside Switzerland and is only available to foreigners. Its tremendous value allowing you a pre-set number of free trips, discounts on public transit, mountain railways, chairlifts and some city attractions and gondolas and trains in some cities. We cannot recommend it highly enough. You feel like a member of an elite club using it, the SwissPass is so useful (3 day SwissPass, 2nd Class is approx. \$ 300 to give you an idea of costs).
- The SBB Inter City train has a car where you can take your bike. Most trains in Switzerland have cars that carry bikes, you must check the bus for the time you want to ensure it will have a bike car as not all trains will carry bikes. Of note, the Bernina Express line of the [Rhätische Bahn](#) (Rhaetian Railway) which travels from Celerina to Tirano over the Bernina Pass has fewer cars that carry bikes.
- We caught a [Post bus](#) from Chur to Laax. This incredible, amazing service (truly one of the Swiss's most enduring contributions to civilization) have 5 bike hooks on the back. They leave fairly regularly so travelling in Switzerland with your bikes is painless. The drivers are friendly, courteous and will help confused jetlagged tourists with a smile and welcome! The Swiss are so honest that no-one will steal your bikes from the back of the bus. Do make sure that the drivers know that you've put a bike on the back otherwise they might drive off before you get a chance to get your bike.
- Some city bus lines in smaller places (eg the Lenzerheide and Celerina buses) do not carry bikes so you must check when you get there if the bus will carry bikes.
- As we were traveling in September it was not that busy for bus transport. In high season you must make a reservation on the bus to ensure you will have a spot for your bike. The tourism center in most cities will make the reservation for you.
- In general all trains except ICN trains and the local Zurich trains during rush hour take bikes (ICN does still take bikes, but only 6 spots on the train and these MUST be reserved in advance). The IR, R, RhB and pretty much any other train line do take bikes except for certain exceptions. If in doubt the online timetable will always show a little bike with a line through it icon if you are not allowed to take the bike. Otherwise it's game on.
- The one catch is that there can be limited room and normally there is no way of knowing (except experience, and even that doesn't always get it right) which trains have a large bike wagon and which ones have space for two bikes in a number of carriages along the length of the train. In general a train that doesn't take bikes is the exception rather than the rule, but care should be taken at busy times.



General Map of Graubünden

Food and Accommodations:

- Unlike in North America grocery stores are not open 24/7 with long hours. Particularly on Saturday and Sundays the stores either have limited hours or are closed. Many grocery stores in small towns close for 1.5 to 2 hours over lunch. So plan accordingly!
- As we fly in on a Saturday we bought food for dinner and the next two days of breakfast so we wouldn't have to worry about it in Laax. Right next to Zurich Airport in the mall is a large grocery store where you can buy what you need. On that note, the larger stores are Coop and Migros. Smaller towns have Volg stores.
- Groceries in Switzerland are about the same price as Canada. Eating out in Switzerland is rather more expensive. Plan on paying about 2x more for meals than you would in Canada. Most hotels offer breakfast, which can double as lunch! So plan on paying about Can \$50 per person for dinners, Can \$ 20 per person for lunch.
- Some hotels offer half-board (dinner and breakfast) while many offer breakfast. Our half-board Swiss experience was quite ordinary. The included dinner was palatable but a bit uninteresting. On the contrary our half-board at Livigno was so good that it almost convinced us to stay (despite the fact that trails were all snowed in).
- "Bike-Hotels" are specific to Graubünden & Livigno. The concept does not seem to exist in Wallis. Basically they are hotels which accommodate bikes ie have bike storage that is secure, laundry, place to wash the bike and don't mind a bit of dirt. They are not 4 or 5 star but can be thought of as 3 star. Often the chairlift or gondola ticket is part of the package. Often breakfast is offered. They are the best deals going and a selection are presented in the story. Look at spending about \$ Can 90 - 110 per person per night during this time of the year (more if in high season)



Restaurant Sanaspans is your basic Swiss alpine restaurant at a little over 2000m

Riding

- The [official Swiss maps](#) are a very nice resource. They show nearly all hiking trails but distinguish between types of trails (singletrack, doubletrack, hike-a-bike too-steep etc) so you should carefully employ map reading skill in interpreting a map.
- We found the best maps for Graubünden trails to be the [Bike Explorer series](#). If you stay at a "Bike-Hotel" in Graubünden usually you will get a free map. Otherwise they are \$15 - 20 apiece.
- The [Single Trail Maps](#) are worth mentioning although we didn't use them but only perused them briefly. They show more clearly what the trail is like than the Bike-explorer series which might be considered more advanced maps. Not all trails are included in them though and the scale is only 1:50000 so they are often best used with a 1:25000 hiking map for proper navigation (more expense). They cost \$ 30 each.
- For enduro and XC rides the best trails to ride are the hiking trails. Pick the ones which look the faintest – usually indicated as a dashed line.
- Be warned that many of the suggested xc/enduro bike routes on bike sites (traildevils.ch, trail.ch, Everytrail.com) include gravel road, double-track or paved road. These suggested routes are just "suggestions" so do not blindly follow suggested bike routes. Use the suggested bike routes or GPS tracks as a guideline but look at a good map and check the suggested Swiss routes against the routes in the map (this includes our own provided routes). Often riders will bypass perfectly good singletrack and ride doubletrack - don't make that same mistake.
- The exception to the rule is [Swiss Alpine Adventures](#) which is the personal site of Dave O'Riordan. The routes recommended there tend to be of high quality. Unlike many of the other Swiss sites which were in German or French (testing our mediocre language skills or Google Translate) SAA is in English. The descriptions are very accurate



Riding through the ridiculously picturesque village of Tschierschen on our way to finish our ride from Lenzerheide to Chur

Riding: cont'd

- When looking at the maps for trails pay attention to the vertical drop of the trails. If contour lines look very steep expect a brake-burner. If there's a way to build a trail through terrain the Swiss/Italians will do – never be surprised by what you find.
- Always always watch out for chue scheisse, a fender if it is wet would be helpful.
- Watch out for electric fences, they will give you a minor buzz. Put the fences back after you cross the gates.
- Respect private property but remember that you are allowed to be anywhere there is a wanderweg sign so don't allow anyone to scare you away (hikers were universally nice to us for some reason).
- Signage is awesome particularly in Graubünden where it is standardized.
- Times shown on signs are hiking speed.
- Signage in Zermatt area could be improved. The names are accurate but symbology is very cryptic (what does a butterfly symbol mean?). The Zermatt bike maps that you pay for are not terribly useful and we recommend you pick up a 1:25,000 hiking map from the local book store instead
- We cannot say that we were terribly excited about riding the mountain bike specific trails in any of the resorts that we went to without a dedicated downhill bike. They are usually really well-used (which means rough) and are best enjoyed with a DH bike with DH tread. Not to be snobbish – this is just our opinion and we are prepared to take some heat about it.
- A word on the famous loops including the Grischia Trail and the Alta-Rezia. In our opinion they involve entirely too much doubletrack and road in order to try to create made-for-marketing epic loops. If your goal is to maximize quality singletrack use the hub and spoke method; base-camp somewhere and radiate out from that base-camp to pick off the selected best singletrack. Grischia Trail and Alta Rezia in particular try to (poorly) emulate a wilderness experience but let's face it. You are in Europe where there is no wilderness unless you head deep into a glacier. If you want wilderness loops stick to NorAm and take a road trip to the Chilcotins, Utah, Montana etc and save your money. Again, this is our opinion and we are prepared to take heat for it.
- The caveat to the above opinion is that the made-for-marketing loops are not fixed loops. No-one is holding a gun to your head forcing you to ride every piece of road, double-track or trail. As with all things, use your head and be creative in finding interesting ways to link up trails. These loops can be improved by planning out your own version that caters to your preferences. If you like singletrack, there are options. If you like road, you can do that. If you're not up for a full epic, take the bus home.
- This begs the question; why Switzerland? For the access to the alpine. For the wonderful scenery. For the culture. For the

friendliness of the Europeans. For the novelty (may it never wear off) of mountaintop restaurants, ice-cream, beer and apple strudel. Don't go to Europe for wilderness loops which don't exist except in the eyes of marketeers.

- Bring spare brake pads & important hard-to-find parts.
- While most trails could be easily ridden on a cross country bike, we were happy to have our 6X6 bikes to smooth out the rocky trails and allow multi day riding.
- Not every hotel in Zermatt has secure bike storage. Check with them and don't assume you have a place to put the bike



So much history in Switzerland. Old meets new

Money:

- Plus/Cirrus ATM cards work on most Swiss banks ATMs. You must change your password to a 4 digit password as many of the European ATM's appear to not like 6 or 8 digit passwords.
- Its never a bad idea to tell your credit card company and/or that you will be in Switzerland so they do not block your card as conducting suspicious activity
- Tipping in Switzerland isn't expected but for sure is appreciated. Tipping is usually rounding up to the nearest round figure.



Old town Chur was built sometime in the late 11th century

Internet:

- Almost every hotel had a wifi connection but it wasn't always that strong.
- Swisscom 3G pay as you go is not cheap; 1CHF per 1MB downloaded. We just used it to check train schedules so 80mb was plenty for three weeks as a guideline. Plan on spending more if you need to check email; download attachments etc
- We picked up a pay as you go SIM card at SwissCom. If you get this make sure they set up your phone to use the card. I couldn't use the data plan initially until I went into another SwissCom store in Chur. We chose Swiss Com since it is the largest provider in Switzerland and provides most land lines. Calls to other Swiss Com phones are free, calls to other providers are charged.



Lift-served hunting off the Rothorn in Lenzerheide

Misc

- Learn some Swiss German just to make life easier – stuff like gruezi and danke to hikers goes a long way. As does Morgen to everyone you meet. That and a wave and a smile.
- Swiss AC adapters are NOT the same as EU adapters and not the same as the NorAm adapters. It makes you wonder how the Euros are going to solve monetary issues if they cannot agree on power outlet standards! Hotels usually have adapters. If you want to buy adapters the ubiquitous [Swiss Post](#) stores had them as do the grocery stores.
- When [dialing phone numbers in Switzerland](#) when you are in Switzerland always dial the area code. When dialing Swiss phone numbers when you are outside Switzerland dial the country code and the area code like so 011-41 – Swiss number. So for the [Trailrider Bike shop in Unterageri](#) their area code is 041 which is Luzern.

If you are calling from Noram, use the Swiss country code of 41 but leave out the zero in the area code and dial (011)-(41)-41-750-90-12

If you calling them from Zurich, leave the zero in the area code and dial (041)-750-90-12

That's all we can think of for now! Feel free to fire questions



Trail markings in Switzerland

Switzerland for Dummies

1. Flims/Laax
2. Lenzerheide
3. Davos Klosters
4. Engadin - St Moritz
5. Zermatt
6. General Hints



Must Read This Week

1. [Gee Atherton rides the GT Fury](#) 43948 reads
2. [Cove 2012 STD - Tested](#) 31297 reads
3. [Sequence Saturday 3](#) 28388 reads
4. [Scott Beaumont signs with Yeti Racing UK](#) 26513 reads
5. [Mbvies for Your Monday](#) 24500 reads
6. [Dan Atherton rides the GT Sanction](#) 22224 reads
7. [Greg Watts Injury Update and Fundraiser!](#) 19325 reads
8. [Chris Krigg: Step by Step](#) 17265 reads

48 Comments




Score Time

- [I-CanDoRideTheBike](#) (Jan 22, 2012 at 0:26) +14
- “ I wish the buses where I lived had bike racks 😊
- [Worm-Bumer](#) (Jan 22, 2012 at 5:15) +7
- “ well I reckon if anywhere in the world was to adopt bike racks on buses it'd be New Zealand...
- [whitwelljames](#) (Jan 22, 2012 at 8:10) (Below Threshold) [show comment](#) -5
- [Sharonb](#) (3 days ago) +4
- “ The bus allows you do ride 6+ hours on single track and skip the 4 hour road ride back to the start...




Pretty civilized if you ask me!




It also made getting to different destinations very simple and we didn't need to rent a car which is a HUGE bonus.

[Reply]




 [Steezysix](#) (Jan 22, 2012 at 2:23) +6  
“ I wouldn't get too hung up on the perfect pronunciation - in my experience of visiting the Alps, however you say it will probably be wrong, but the fact that you're making the effort goes a long way with locals.

 [flowzone](#) (Jan 22, 2012 at 6:46) +1  
“ you bet 😊




 [leelau](#) (Jan 22, 2012 at 7:17) +2  
“ Its a fascinating language though and I like languages. It's very cool how the dialect changes from valley to valley

 [iainmac-1](#) (1 days ago) +1  
“ It was pretty cool hearing swiss french, then in a matter of hours having to get used to swiss german in the same country!

[Reply]

 [mobweb](#) (Jan 22, 2012 at 9:41) +2  
“ Thanks so much for doing this whole series! I hope it will attract more tourists and make even more resorts realize that they should invest in mountainbike structure. 😊 Graubünden really is doing a stellar job with their offerings to the mountainbike community but some other cantons are still lacking. 😊

[Reply]

 [jan99](#) (Jan 22, 2012 at 0:21) +4  
“ Cows are called Kühe, not chue!!!!!!!!!!!! and the reason we don't have wilderness is because Switzerland is tiny compared to Canada.




 [flowzone](#) (Jan 22, 2012 at 6:44) +6  
“ you really from switzerland jan? we do call our cows "chue"

 [jan99](#) (Jan 22, 2012 at 6:46) +1  
“ Scheisse! Sorry

 [jan99](#) (Jan 22, 2012 at 6:50) +2  
“ Ich bin eigentlich von deutschland, aber wohn in der schweiz

 [leelau](#) (Jan 22, 2012 at 7:13) +1  
“ One thing I learned in Switzerland is that Swiss German is not quite the same as German!




Agreed on the wilderness - from Part 4 Engadin of the series - " Switzerland as a whole is 41,285 square km. About 7.8m people live there. Compare this to, for example, Vancouver Island which is considered quite populated by Canadian standards (33,000 square km; about 750,000 people), or the states of Vermont and New Hampshire combined (48,000 square km; about 1.9m people combined). Swiss population density is greater than North American"

 [trickn0l0gy](#) (Jan 22, 2012 at 10:08) +1  
“ muahaha, that was the best one! CHUE isch schwyzerdütsch, jan!!! hasch jetz wo gelämt? X-D

[Reply]

 [robinjones](#) (Jan 22, 2012 at 0:39) +5  
“ I agree. All bus's should have bike racks.




[Reply]

 [luke-smith](#) (2 days ago) +3  
“ "Always always watch out for chue scheisse" so true 😊 Hunde Scheisse is a problem too.

[Reply]




 [reto](#) (Jan 22, 2012 at 0:57) +3  
“ Nice write ups, thanks. Btw "chue" is the correct Swiss German word for cow :-)

[Reply]

 [TrueLies](#) (Jan 22, 2012 at 5:05) +1  
“ Great summary, very helpful too. Just one thing, the link to the "Swiss Alpine Adventures" page is the same as the "swiss pass" one, maybe you should fix that.




 [leelau](#) (Jan 22, 2012 at 7:15) +1  
“ Thank you! Of course its <http://www.swissalpineadventure.com/>




[Reply]

 [ktm87](#) (Jan 22, 2012 at 7:55) +2  
“ did anyone else notice in the picture where is is loading the bike on the bus, there is no rear shock!!




 [mrcrazy](#) (3 days ago) +1  

“ hahahahahahhaahaha.....ktm87 u r write there is NO REAR SHOCKWTF???????




 **ktm87** (2 days ago) +1  
“ i know! CRAZY!!

 **leelau** (2 days ago) +1  
“ Guys - trust me on this. There is a rear shock on the bike. His hand is blocking your view. Don't worry - you don't have to take the rear shock off to put it on the bus bike racks




[\[Reply\]](#)

 **kjl845** (2 days ago) +1  
“ I'd rather eat that goat than some farm raised animal thats been pumped full of growth hormones. Nice rifle also. Beautiful country.

[\[Reply\]](#)

 **Luke-VTT** (3 days ago) +1  
“ Very nice and helpful serial. Even for one that lives in Germany. But do you have any more pictures of this wonderful Knolly?




[\[Reply\]](#)

 **Kriss-falle** (Jan 22, 2012 at 5:11) +1  
“ Really good story. Thanks for all the info you gave us. This i really complete.

[\[Reply\]](#)




 **freeriding** (Jan 22, 2012 at 5:08) +1  
“ Good job! Intresting and funny to read :-)




[\[Reply\]](#)

 **epavichthesavage** (3 days ago) +1  
“ 'General Hint Number 1'

Money
And LOTS of it


[\[Reply\]](#)

 **NOTOri0us** (3 days ago) +1  
“ Interesting that they rent a hotel room just to store bike bags....




 **leelau** (3 days ago) +1  
“ After reading that I did not explain that part very well! Thanks for catching it

There was no charge for storing the bike bags. That service was provided along with the one night hotel room booking. We needed the hotel room because of our plane flight which was very early in the morning.

[\[Reply\]](#)

 **panzer103** (Jan 22, 2012 at 4:11) +1  
“ If I ever go this is good info. Danke




[\[Reply\]](#)

 **sngltrkmd** (1 days ago) +1  
“ Thanks for this great post! I have had a Swiss trip in mind for years.

[\[Reply\]](#)

 **valtra** (2 days ago) +1  
“ edit




[\[Reply\]](#)

 **alban-aubert** (2 days ago) +1  
“ Great series!




[\[Reply\]](#)

 **tabletop84** (2 days ago) +1  
“ nevermind

[\[Reply\]](#)

 **GermanyFreeride** (Jan 22, 2012 at 3:42) +1  
“ nice work

[\[Reply\]](#)




 **Richieyzjones** (Jan 22, 2012 at 3:37) +0  
“ Why would u put cold water onto a hot disk and risk warping it???




[\[Reply\]](#)




 **Dan1210** (Jan 22, 2012 at 0:41) -3  
“ I'd like to have that guy slung over my shoulder with his tongue hanging out so i could put him up on my wall as a trophy!




 **gingeminja** (Jan 22, 2012 at 1:38) +8  




“ id say hes going to be taking it home and eating that.




 [yeti85](#) (Jan 22, 2012 at 4:11) +7  
“ Here in Switzerland you need a license to hunt and every certain period of time (yearly?) hunters have to pass a test. The amount of each animal that they can hunt is very tightly controlled. There are very few if none that hunt for fun here, it's more of a job to control populations and dangerous animals (like freak bears or wolves that get to near human populations). And the number that can be shot each year is determined by the government. So next time think before you talk.




 [Worm-Bumer](#) (Jan 22, 2012 at 5:16) +2  
“ Freak Bears! Freak Wolves!.....

 [leelau](#) (Jan 22, 2012 at 7:16) +1  
“ That was meat for his family! Lift-served hunting

 [tabletop84](#) (Jan 22, 2012 at 9:21) +1  
“ I have a hunting license in germany and that "There are very few if none that hunt for fun here" is wrong. Hunting is damn expensive and it simply wouldn't be worth to do this just for nutrition purposes. I'd say that 80% of european hunters are mainly "trophy hunters", sure they don't throw away the meat but they are mainly interested in the trophy itself. You pay more than thousand euros for killing a chamois in the alps.Pricing is even equated to the weight and credit points the trophy has.

 [RoverDover](#) (3 days ago) +2  
“ Oh no! a poor sensitive, vegan Brit has taken offense at a picture of a dead animal and a gun! get over it, every where else in the civilized world people own guns and shoot animals to eat them and for sport. I know you Brits are terrified of firearms but the fact is nearly every household in Switzerland has a gun.

 [valtra](#) (3 days ago) +1  
“ To add to that fact, Switzerland also has some of the best gun control in the world.

 [animaldesbois](#) (2 days ago) +1  
“ And we eat Horse as well! Here in Switzerland we have Hunting season and we love to eat these specialities.Like in most part of the world. Of course they are trophy hunter, like they are stupid people on bike.

 [tabletop84](#) (2 days ago) +0  
“ and dogs:

<http://willkommen-tv.at/player.php?sid=F10#F10>
/>
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNo_lfMlNtK

[\[Reply\]](#)

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