

TRAVEL

1



WEEKENDER ——— Grindelwald

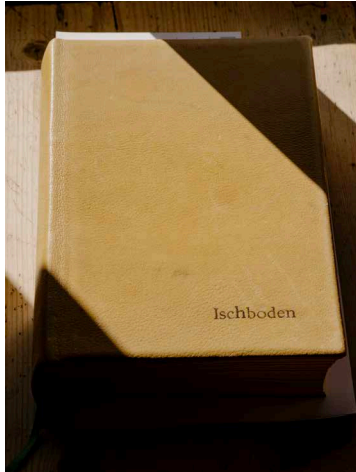
CARVING A NEW PATH

With its spectacular scenery, Grindelwald in the heart of the Bernese Oberland has long attracted skiers and nature lovers alike. But this celebrated mountain village isn't resting on its laurels: a new generation of hoteliers is preserving tradition while reimagining what an Alpine resort can offer.

Photographer — Sabine Hess
Writer — Marcela Palek



1



2



3

Previous page
1. Sledging on the Bussalp mountain

This spread
1. EigerBean on Dorfstrasse
2. Ischboden Alpine hut's guestbook
3. Preparing bread for a fondue
4. Great-grandmother's wood stove
5. Beat Hutmacher, also known as Yeti

"The huts are like my children," says Beat "Yeti" Hutmacher when he meets *Konfekt* at Grindelwald station, the terminus of the Bernese Oberland Railway. The former mountain guide and pilot grew up in the nearby Berghaus Männlichen, a hotel run by his parents that stands at more than 2,200 metres above sea level. Hutmacher now offers seven rentals around Grindelwald village. "They are my great passion," he says as we make our way towards the diminutive Ischboden Alpine hut, which sits picturesquely among mighty maple trees. "By using them for guests instead of shepherds, I can preserve the history and heritage of the region."

There's no direct vehicle access here in winter and luggage must be hauled to the huts by sledge across thick snow. "My grandfather used to live here when he tended sheep from spring to autumn and I would often visit to help him," says Hutmacher as we enter the hut, where every detail has been restored using wood from the surrounding area. A huge former farm sledge serves as a bedframe. "Plastic is nowhere to be found," he says.

It's this return to elemental activities – shovelling snow, lighting fires and riding a sledge into the village – that guests, who are mostly from Switzerland and Germany, find luxurious. "They appreciate the deep tranquillity of it all and the break from everyday urban life – the reduction of things to the essentials," he says.

For Hutmacher, the huts also represent a return to the region's traditional values, a preservation of its way of life. "In the past we wore leather ski boots, cheese was made on the mountain and we used to meet regularly for yodelling and folk-costume festivals," he says.

Hutmacher's vision of winter luxury is just one of many new approaches to

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hospitality in the region reimagining how snowy retreats can look and feel. This corner of the Bernese Alps has long been a pioneer of winter tourism. It was among the first resorts to welcome visitors to ski and skate; the earliest hotel here opened in the 1820s. Today, as a new cohort of hoteliers take the reins, it's both holding on to its heritage and challenging some of the rules of the ski resort.

Jan and Justine Pyott, who moved to Grindelwald in 2016, embody this spirit of change and renewal. Originally from Biel, Jan is an ex-triathlete, while Parisian Justine was an avid base jumper with an interest in both urban and mountain jumps. "You can't be a professional in sports forever,"



4



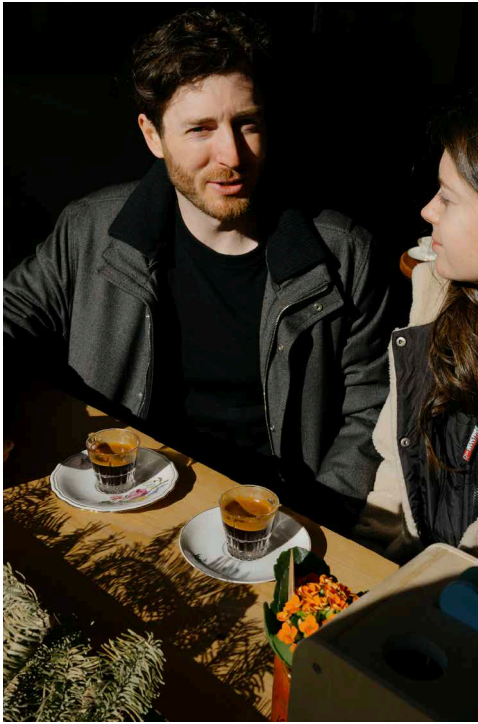
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1. Start of the Bussalp sledging route
2. Scandinavian-style room at Hotel Fiescherblick
3. Customers enjoy coffee at EigerBean
4. Onsen bath at Hotel Fiescherblick
5. Kringle bakery and café
6. Alpine panorama from Bussalp



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says Jan. “Neither of us has any training in hospitality or tourism, so taking over one of the oldest hotels in the region, which dates back to 1864, has been a great adventure.”

The couple plan to launch a new project in the near future, when Grindelhuus will have tunnel connecting directly to the terminal of the Eiger Express gondola service, which transports visitors between Grindelwald and Eigergletscher. “With the Grindelhuus, we are planning a hotel with spacious rooms and a direct lift to the terminal – so you can easily go from your bed to the Jungfrauoch [observation platform],” says Jan.

The Pyotts also run the Grindellodge, an inn with an interior that subtly evokes Japanese decor with plenty of light wood. Here, in the evenings, Umami restaurant serves warming ramen soups and *donburi* rice bowls prepared by Tokyo-born chef Shota Hasegawa. This connection to Japan is no accident. The Alpine village has a long history with the country’s mountaineers, says Jan. In 1921, Maki “Yūko” Aritsune from Sendai city in Miyagi prefecture achieved the first ascent of the Eiger’s Mittellegi Ridge; in 1969, Japanese climbers conquered the steep and challenging Direttissima route up the Eiger North Face.

Jan points out the ten axes on the wall in the Grindellodge lobby. “These are the historic handmade ice axes crafted by the village blacksmith, Bhend, which the Japanese used to ascend the mountain,” he says.

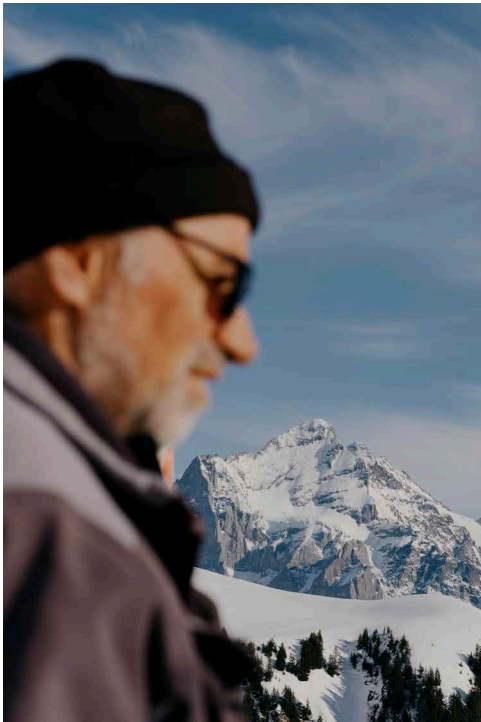
Grindelwald is holding on to the charm of its Swiss Alpine roots while pushing at new concepts. “Differentiation is the recipe for success today,” says Lars Michel of Hotel Fiescherblick, which he has run with his brother, Matthias, for about three years. The 19-key hotel has a rooftop *onsen* bath and Finnish sauna. “In the past, it used to be more about group tourism,” he says. “Today, however, there are more travellers looking for quality and something special.”

Fiescherblick stands right next to Hotel Gletschergarten, run by the brothers’ parents and founded in 1899 by their great-great-grandfather. “Our great-grandmother, Huldi, was the first woman in Grindelwald to drive a car in the 1930s,” says Lars. “She was quite a character.” In Hotel Gletschergarten’s lobby and staircase, he shows *Konfekt* a series of black-and-white family photographs, including one of him and Matthias as little boys.

Their next venture – Da Huldi, a small osteria that is scheduled to open across the street in 2027 – will be named after their great-grandmother. Meanwhile, the pair have paid homage to their Danish grandfather with Kringle, a bakery and café that opened last summer. Its cardamom buns are particularly popular; these are made by Nadja and Oliver Fuhrer’s welcoming bakery Qraftwerk on nearby Dorfstrasse. Their signature offering is the handmade croissants, which



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At the high tables

Grindelwald has become a hub of excellent cuisine, largely thanks to the reputation of a handful of chefs. Aurélien Mettler of the Fiescherblick, from Interlaken, creates a 13-course tasting menu in the evenings using fresh, locally sourced ingredients. Host Lars Michel, alongside his brother Matthias, likes to help harvest mushrooms in the autumn and blueberries in the summer, which later adorn the plate. On the menu when *Konfekt* visits, we find homemade sourdough bread with alpine butter and warm cauliflower with gochujang and pumpkin seeds; this is followed by Grindelwald venison with potatoes, peach and cabbage, plus a cheese course.

At the Glacier, French chef Paul Cabayé – named the Gault&Millau Newcomer of the Year in 2024 – is in charge. In the evening there's a six-course menu, while at lunchtime it's à la carte. Cabayé only uses regional produce: Swiss Alpine salmon, bread from Ringgenberg bakery, herbs grown in-house.

Urs Gschwend, formerly of Les Trois Rois in Basel, has been based at BG's Grill Restaurant at the Bergwelt Grindelwald for two years; even his simplest dishes, such as the Caesar salad, are excellent and the elegant desserts are superb.

At Hotel Belvedere, you'll find 1910 Gourmet by Hausers, which received a Michelin star in 2024. Here, only six tables occupy the cosy parlour. Hungarian chef Dávid Imre Rózsa's aromatic dishes are modern interpretations of traditional home cooking – dishes that previous generations might have prepared on a simple wood stove.

hotel-fiescherblick.ch;
theglacier.ch;
bergwelt-grindelwald.com;
belvedere-grindelwald.ch

- 1. Sledging in Grindelwald
- 2. 1910 Gourmet by Hausers
- 3. Dávid Imre Rózsa, 1910's chef
- 4. Pumpkin speciality at the Glacier



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are usually sold out by midday. At Kringle, you'll also find coffee from EigerBean, roasted locally by the business's founder, Marco Münch. "I'm originally from Thuringia in Germany," he tells *Konfekt*. "I have been living here with my family since 2010. Three years ago I opened the roastery and a café, and have made a name for myself among connoisseurs of speciality coffee." He enthuses about the camaraderie among Grindelwald's new wave of entrepreneurs.

Like recipes and traditions, historic family hotels tend to be passed down the generations in this region. Here, in 2025 alone, seven family-run hotels handed over their leadership to younger family

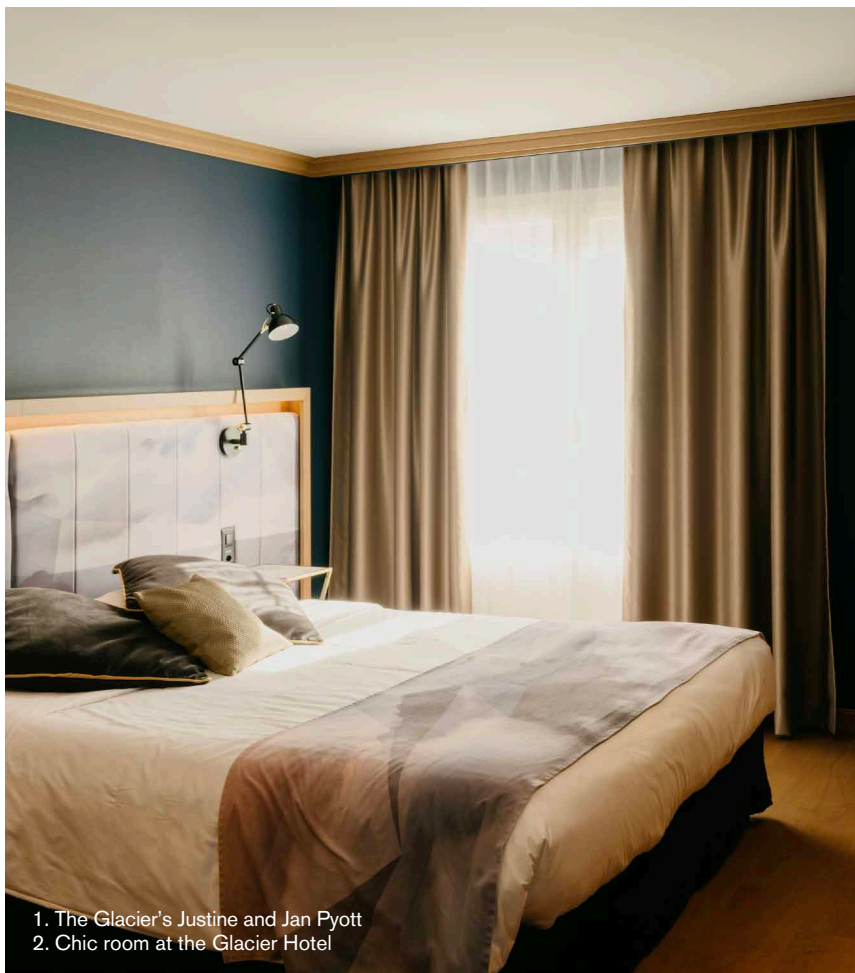
"The community is deeply rooted in the massive mountains and nature, and they shape its inhabitants"

members. Besides Fiescherblick, the Gletschergarten, the Belvedere, Parkhotel Schöneegg, the Alpina, the Hirschen and the Kreuz all went into new hands.

Stefan Grossniklaus, the host of Hotel Aspen and the president of the Swiss Hotel Association Bernese Oberland, compares this shift to a sporting competition and says that it is giving the region's hospitality scene a renewed vigour. "The movement and creativity in the sector is inspiring for all of us," he says in the lobby of the Aspen, which lies on the opposite side of the valley and offers a magnificent view of Grindelwald. "And on top of all of this, the region will soon have a five-star stay – the *belle époque* Grand Hotel Regina, an icon of the resort, right by the railway station," he says of the opening, which is slated for 2029.

The village is defined by its proximity to the enormous mountains. At 1,034 metres above sea level, there is a tremendous elevation difference with the 4,000-metre peaks surrounding it. "The community is deeply rooted in the massive mountains and the environment, and they shape its inhabitants," says Grossniklaus. There's a strong sense of connection to the land. "In the region there are still about 70 active farmers too."

For all the innovation taking place in the valley, the quirks of the past remain very much alive. It was this village that pioneered wooden bicycle sledges known as Velogemels in the early 20th century. They're still produced locally and feature in a traditional race that's held every February. They can also be rented on Bussalp, a mountain destination 1,800 metres above sea level. It's one of Europe's longest sledge runs – more than 11km of white slopes to speed down, taking in the pristine view as you go. — K



1. The Glacier's Justine and Jan Pyott
2. Chic room at the Glacier Hotel

2