

Luzern's lion, lake and lovely bridges



Rick Steves

Pretty, pristine and perched on a lake, with a striking mountain panorama as a backdrop, Luzern has long been Switzerland's tourism capital. Since the Romantic era in the 19th century, it's been a regular stop on the "Grand Tour" of Europe for the likes of Mark Twain and Queen Victoria.

And with a charming old town, a pair of picture-perfect wooden bridges, a gaggle of fine museums, an ultramodern concert hall and its famous weeping lion, there's still enough in Luzern to earn it a place on any Swiss itinerary.

If you've never been to Switzerland, Luzern (also spelled Lucerne) offers an enticing, I-could-live-here glimpse of the appealing and uniquely Swiss urban quality of life. Efficient buses glide around town, pedestrian bridges span the crystal-clear river and an array of cruise boats ply scenic Lake Luzern.

Simply wandering the city's clean streets, strolling its bridges and cruising the lake is enough for a happy day of sightseeing. But Luzern also offers some fine attractions. Art buffs flock to the Rosengart Collection for its Picasso exhibit; gearheads have a ball at the Swiss Transport Museum; and rockhounds dig the city's Glacier Garden.

Luzern began as a fishing village on the Reuss River where it tumbles out of Lake Luzern. By the 13th century, with traffic between northern and southern Europe streaming through the nearby Gotthard Pass, the city became a bustling trading center. All that traffic brought the construction of two covered wooden



Covered and filled with paintings, Chapel Bridge in Luzern, Switzerland, zigzags its way across the Reuss River. **DOMINIC ARIZONA BONUCCELLI**

river bridges that are now Luzern icons.

In the 14th century, the Chapel Bridge (Kapellbrücke) was oddly built across the river — spanning its banks at an angle to connect the town's fortifications. Under its rafters hang about 100 colorful 17th-century paintings showing contemporary and historic scenes.

There are landscapes of Luzern in about 1400, portraits of its two patron saints, and a legendary giant who dates to the Middle Ages, when locals misidentified newly discovered mammoth bones as human.

The other famous bridge — Mill Bridge (Spreuerbrücke) — also has fine 17th-century paintings, which shows Luzern's favorite giant again, with the blue-and-white city

and cantonal banners under the double eagle of the Holy Roman Empire — a reminder that the emperor granted free status to the city. The flip side shows Judgment Day, with some going to heaven and others to hell.

Another emblematic sight is the Lion Monument (Löwendenkmal). This free, famous memorial is an essential stop if you're visiting Luzern — if only because when you get back home, everyone will ask you "Did you see the lion?" Open from sunrise to dusk, the huge sculpture (33 feet long by 20 feet tall) is carved right into a cliff face, over a reflecting pool in a peaceful park.

It's often overrun with tour groups, so a tranquil moment here is genuinely moving: The mighty lion rests his paws on a shield,

with his head cocked to one side, tears streaming down his cheeks. In his side is the broken-off end of a spear, which is slowly killing the noble beast. (Note the angle of the spear, which matches the striations of the rock face, subtly suggesting more spears raining down on the lion.)

This heartbreaking figure represents the Swiss mercenaries who were killed or executed defending the French king in the French Revolution. The inscription reads: *Helvetiorum fidei ac virtuti* — "To the loyalty and bravery of the Swiss."

Along with its historic landmarks, Luzern has distinctive modern architecture. On the waterfront is a huge boxy building with a big flat overhanging roof — the Luzern Culture

and Conference Center. Lake water is pumped up, into, through and out of this building; if you wander around its far side, you'll see open channels that go right through the middle of the structure.

One of the best ways to experience Luzern is by boat. Each of Lake Luzern's 44 square miles reflects a different angle of jagged mountaintops and green foothills in its turquoise water. Cruise boats cover a variety of routes and destinations — 35 stops in all — ranging from a one-hour sampler tour around Luzern's "harbor" to a full-blown, six-hour exploration to the far end of the lake and back. Some routes are round-trip dinner or sightseeing cruises, but most boats have scheduled stops and are designed for

you to get out, explore and then take the next boat back. Romantics will want to hitch a ride on one of the old-fashioned paddleboat steamers.

From its dramatic scenery and quaint wooden bridges to its modern, urban efficiency, Luzern is one of Switzerland's gems. No visit to Switzerland is really complete without sampling the country's urban charms ... and Luzern sparkles as perhaps the brightest of all.

Rick Steves writes European guidebooks, hosts travel shows on public TV and radio, and organizes European tours. This column revisits some of Rick's favorite places over the past two decades. Visit his website at ricksteves.com, email him at rick@ricksteves.com or follow his blog on Facebook.

CELEBRITY TRAVEL

Spring magical time for musician

By **Jae-Ha Kim**
Tribune Content Agency

"Every audience has a regional vibe (that's) wonderful," musician Dar Williams said. "I've learned that in the United Kingdom, oftentimes they are laughing and appreciating a concert — on the inside. After the concert is when I find out I haven't bombed."

"Irish audiences have been so demonstrative and generous. I told an audience in Dublin that I couldn't do an encore because I'd just caught my family's stomach bug and had to throw up. They applauded with gusto. Canadian audiences appreciate every kind of humor. New England is very different from the Bay Area too! You can really feel it. These have been my general experiences."

Williams' latest album, "Hummingbird Highway," is a cohesive collection of songs that celebrate the everyday moments at home and when she's on the road touring.

This interview with the New York resident was edited for length and clarity.

Q: Was "Tu Sais Le Printemps" from your new album influenced by any time you've spent in France?

A: I'm positive that any time in France will stay with you forever. Back in 2002, our honeymoon was morning coffee, a couple of museums, long dinners and about 10 miles of walking every day across bridges, around cathedrals and through ornate flower



"Hummingbird Highway" singer-songwriter Dar Williams is looking forward to touring again in 2026. **CARLY RAE BRUNALT**

gardens. But you don't have to go to Paris to know the effect that spring can have on memory and inhibition.

Q: Why did you decide to include a few French phrases in the song?

A: There is a beautiful photo of French defiance that I saw in 2016. It was of three lacy bras, blue, white and red, hanging from a wrought-iron balcony. Romance is so important. Originally the whole song was in French, but alas, high school-level aptitude was insufficient, one might say.

Q: Do you speak French or any other languages besides English?

A: I've been a diligent Spanish-app learner for three years, and I remember having enough French to tell a drunk teenager on a boat that he had to get to an upper deck because of the gas fumes. I thought, "Enough French to be helpful. I'll take it." That said, I told an audience in Paris that my babysitter had pants with many corridors.

Q: How do you maintain your health when touring?

A: I have a long list of ways to stay healthy — sleep, water, stretching, hand-washing — and a long list of things to do when you're unfortunately sick (that includes) lemon water, ibuprofen, apple

cider vinegar shots, lowering the keys to every song! My life changed when I learned that reducing inflammation is key. I feel like turmeric supplements cut my illnesses down to an eighth of what they'd been in number and duration.

Q: Do you work on songs when you're traveling?

A: I love walking through a museum, thinking my thoughts, then getting a coffee and working on a song. I also love being at home with my guitar and messing around with different chords to jump-start things. The best is when songs just come up in daily life.

Q: Do you have any upcoming trips planned?

A: We have a national tour for "Hummingbird Highway" from the winter through spring 2026, and then I'm off to the U.K. and Ireland for the first time since 2018.

Q: Where are your favorite weekend getaways?

A: My touring life is all about loving the rest of the world. My nontouring weekends are about discovering my own turf.

Q: What are your five favorite cities?

A: Montreal, Edinburgh, London, Berkeley and Pittsburgh.

For more from the reporter, visit www.jaehakim.com.

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

Aer Lingus vows full refund after pilot strike, to no avail

By **Christopher Elliott** | King Features Syndicate

I paid \$7,155 for a business class ticket from Hartford, Connecticut, to Dublin on Aer Lingus.

When a pilot strike threatened my trip, the airline emailed me three options, including a full refund, which I selected.

Aer Lingus refunded me \$6,096 but withheld \$1,058, claiming that business class tickets only qualify for an 85% refund.

I filed multiple claims, called repeatedly, even sent a registered letter to the CEO. No one responded.

How can I get back my money?

— *Martha Rhine, West Hartford, Connecticut*

A: Aer Lingus owes you the full refund it promised. Period. Under EU Regulation 261, passengers are entitled to a full refund if their flight is canceled because of a strike. Airlines can't impose arbitrary refund caps based on fare class in this situation.

Aer Lingus's 85% policy appears to violate EU 261. Worse, the airline ignored your documented requests for months, and this is a blatant violation of consumer trust.

Aer Lingus should have processed your refund promptly after you asked for it. Its customer service department should have stated its policies up front and escalated your case when you had a problem. And, of course, the CEO's office should have acknowledged your letter when you wrote it rather

than stonewalling.

Maybe Aer Lingus got confused when refunding your ticket. It thought you had requested a refund of the ticket for reasons other than the strike, and the rules for your business class tickets only entitled you to an 85% refund.

You did everything right. You saved correspondence, pursued multiple channels and contacted executives. But when companies dig in, persistence alone isn't enough.

This is when involving an advocate or regulators like the U.S. Department of Transportation or the Irish Aviation Authority becomes critical.

Filing a complaint with one or both of these agencies might have been enough to light a fire under Aer Lingus to give you what it promised.

By the way, you don't have to send the CEO a letter next time. You can start at the beginning of the executive chain, which might result in a faster response. I publish the emails of all the Aer Lingus executives on my consumer advocacy site, elliott.org.

I contacted Aer Lingus on your behalf. "Aer Lingus sincerely apologizes for the delay in processing this customer's full refund," a representative responded. "The outstanding amount has now been processed as a matter of priority."

Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Contact him at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.